

HopeHIV and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference AIDS Office
The Care of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Conference
Sizanani Conference Centre – Gauteng, South Africa
09-12 November 2003

Final Recommendations

Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference and HopeHIV have gathered together 185 delegates representing 12 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to consider how better to address the care of orphans and vulnerable children. Delegates, most of whom work in the field, have listened to keynote speakers, participated in practice focussed workshops, and shared their stories and experiences with each other over three days.

Clearly the situation regarding children who have been orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa now constitutes an international humanitarian crisis. The number of orphans is already around 12 million and is estimated to reach 20 million by 2010. This is in the context of serious economic deprivation, crippling international debt, unfair trade policies, inadequate government infrastructures and widespread stigma, discrimination and denial around HIV/AIDS. Despite the apathy in many parts of the developed world, faith based organisations have the capacity and are already making a significant contribution.

Believing inherently in the capacity of communities, families and the young people themselves to respond, delegates at this conference commit themselves corporately and individually to support and prioritise:

- The participation, in age appropriate ways, of young people at all levels of our response, with particular emphasis on training and leadership development.
- The scaling out of psycho-social support;
- Advocating for the rights of orphans and vulnerable children to birth certificates, inheritance of property and access to basic services such as health, education and government grants;
- The development of effective partnerships, including those with other faith based organisations which may cross traditional boundaries;
- The effective monitoring, evaluation and documentation of all our work with orphans and vulnerable children;
- Lobbying governments to make available antiretrovirals and PMTCT medication, accompanied by adequate distribution networks and nutritional support, at affordable rates to all infected persons including children;
- The protection and support of the most vulnerable children, especially those living with HIV/AIDS and/or disabilities;
- The essential integration of prevention with care, in particular utilising the skills of people living with HIV/AIDS;

- Breaking down of stigma, discrimination and denial;
- Facilitation of community- owned and –directed responses.
- Increased support for the caregivers of orphans, in particular the elderly;

Among other issues delegates also recognise:

- The essential role played by volunteers and will continue to grapple with how to both sustain responses in resource poor settings and appropriately reward and protect unpaid labour.
- The important but changing role of residential care in the face of limited resources and an increased emphasis on community based responses.