

SOUTHERN.AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (SACBC)

Media Release

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Catholic Bishops announce the launch of their Antiretroviral programmes in 22 sites in Southern Africa

Thirty bishops, clergy and religious, and thousands of people were present when the SACBC announced the official launch of its Anti Retroviral (ARV) programme in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland at a Mass celebrated at Regina Mundi Church in Soweto on Sunday 30 January.

This marked a further development in the HIV / AIDS programmes, which the Catholic Church has been running for several years, comprising home-based nursing and counselling, care for orphans and vulnerable children, hospice in-patient units, and education and prevention programmes.

Training of doctors and nurses for ARV programmes began towards the end of 2003. During 2004, the provision of ARVs began in 22 sites. Crucial to the implementation of this ARV programme is the careful accompaniment of patients on ARV treatment by the Church's home-care workers, many of whom are volunteers. A great debt of gratitude is owed to them.

Twenty sites, across seven of the provinces, are in South Africa, and are funded through the PEPFAR initiative of the United States Government. They are mostly in outlying areas not yet served by the South African Department of Health.

A Netherlands Catholic Agency, CORDAID, supports an outreach programme of Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki, Swaziland, into remote rural areas. In Francistown, Botswana, CORDAID supports the treatment of foreign patients who are not citizens of Botswana.

The Ford Foundation from USA supports additional people on treatment at two sites in KwaZulu Natal: Madadeni (Newcastle) and Mtubatuba (Ingwavuma).

Fifteen hundred patients, including children, were on treatment at the end of December, with others beginning adherence training with the view to commencing treatment over the coming weeks.

Based on the results of a study commissioned by the Catholic Church, the SACBC applauds the breakdown of stigma where people are on treatment, giving them hope and new chances, while at the same time it recognizes the challenges in providing treatment to children.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference acknowledges and appreciates the cooperation offered by the South African Health Department and by the Provincial Hospitals, a collaboration that has facilitated the launching of the ARV programmes.

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