

Live the Promise Campaign Press Release: 28 February 2014

Drugs and Dignity Key to End AIDS

A road map to increase faith-based organizations' work in providing life-preserving treatment, especially in low-income countries and among marginalized populations in all parts of the world, is a key outcome of a consultation to expand access to treatment for people living with HIV, co-organized by [Caritas Internationalis](#) and [UNAIDS](#), held in Rome, 25-26 February 2014. The meeting was co-sponsored by the [Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance \(EAA\)](#), among others.

"We are entering a new phase where we can see the beginning of the end of AIDS," said Dr Luiz Loures, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director Programme, UNAIDS. "The faith communities have the scale, and have the means to move us forward. You care about dignity of the person – and it is only this unique combination of access to drugs and dignity that can provide the necessary drive to reach the end of AIDS."

Outcomes of the meeting include commitments by UNAIDS and other international agencies to facilitate national dialogues on the role of faith-based organizations in the HIV response and on increased access to funding and resources for this scale up. In addition, more research on results of faith-based HIV treatment programs was highlighted as a priority, as well as strategic communication about the good work done by these organizations, and more intensive networking and sharing of good practice models.

Noting that churches and other faith-based organizations are the largest single group providing health care services for HIV – contributing up to 50% of facility-based and community care in some countries – Loures emphasized that collaboration with faith-based organizations in dramatically scaling up treatment is essential.

"This consultation is a sign of the new era of collaboration, which focuses on the people in need," said Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja. "Where we manage to link hands, the impact far exceeds the sum of our individual efforts."

The consultation is related to UNAIDS' Treatment 2015 initiative to reach at least 15 million people living

with HIV with antiretroviral treatment by 2015.

The over 100 participants represented diverse Christian faith traditions, UNAIDS, Vatican offices, governments, the medical and scientific community, and the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. In addition to Caritas Internationalis, other participating EAA member organizations included CAFOD, Catholic Relief Services, Cordaid, INERELA+, Maryknoll, Tearfund, Trocaire, and World Vision International.

Challenges that were identified included the need for significant financial investment now in treatment services, closing the gap in testing and treating children, technical capacity building, inclusion of faith-based organizations in decision making at national levels, and ensuring coordination rather than duplication of services in areas supported by multiple donors.

Others recognized the challenges still to be overcome within churches and religious communities themselves.

“Churches are still struggling to understand the epidemic and its role advocating for holistic care of those living with HIV,” said Rev. Phumzile Mabizela, Executive Director, International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV or AIDS (INERELA+). She identified issues like inequality between women and men, poverty and apathy as “our worst enemies.”

The progress made over the three decades since the HIV virus was first identified, the hope that the eradication of AIDS now seems possible, and the commitment and urgency to act were consistent themes in the meeting.

“Our opportunity to end the epidemic is here and now,” stated Dr. Julio Montaner, Director, British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Providence Health Care.

The Consultation was supported by UNAIDS, Caritas Internationalis, UNITAID, the United States Embassy to the Holy See, and CUAMM- Doctors for Africa. Co-sponsors included the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria; Catholic Relief Services; and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

See also Caritas Internationalis article:
<http://www.caritas.org/2014/02/drugs-dignity-and-drive-to-end-aids/>

from UNAIDS webpage:
<http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2014/february/20140227FBOconsultation/>

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The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance is the most inclusive international advocacy network of churches and Christian organizations, with members representing Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. Our members are committed to speaking and acting together on issues of common concern, currently HIV and AIDS and Food. As an alliance of over 80 churches and church-related organizations located around the world with members and constituents in the tens of millions, we are called by our faith to stand for justice, peace and a sustainable world. www.e-alliance.ch

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