

AJANews 103 - World AIDS Day 2011

AJANews is very happy to send you the World AIDS Day 2011 message from the President of JESAM (Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar). Please quote and disseminate as you see fit.

REASON TO HOPE BUT NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY

The global AIDS response gives us good reason to hope for a future free from the pandemic as long as efforts to care for those affected and to ensure universal access to quality treatment are sustained and improved. But AIDS remains a serious threat to life and there is no room for complacency.

This is the conviction that the Jesuits of Africa and Madagascar, through the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN), want to share on World AIDS Day 2011. We are backed in this conviction by the UNAIDS vision of *Zero new HIV infections, Zero discrimination, Zero AIDS-related deaths*, and by the latest reflections of Pope Benedict XVI about Africa, "land of hope". We are also encouraged by countless examples, of Christians and other people of goodwill, who do all they can to care for those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Latest statistics allow for cautious optimism, with a notable decline in new infections and the scale-up of antiretroviral treatment (ART) in sub-Saharan Africa by 20% between 2009 and 2010. However, 68% of the global total of 34 million people with HIV live in this region and the number of new infections remains high.

AJAN echoes the calls of UNAIDS and Pope Benedict for investment in treatment. The proven therapeutic and preventive benefits of ART promote life, which it is our duty to defend. The recently issued apostolic exhortation of Pope Benedict, *Africae Munus*, encourages research institutes to "discover solutions and provide everyone with access to treatments and medicines". Increasing evidence shows that ART not only prevents deaths and improves quality of life but also reduces new infections. Prevention has become ever more urgent as a new generation, born after the arrival of the pandemic, reaches adulthood.

Our resources against the disease are always strained but this is an area that needs constant vigilance and progress if we are to work for an HIV-free world. We often neglect to thank scientists who quietly work away at making better drugs to help people live with HIV/AIDS.

But ART alone is not enough; it needs to be part of a holistic approach that - as Pope Benedict advises - combines pharmaceutical solutions with ethical concerns, behaviour change and integral development. The Catholic Church has long been offering such a holistic response. AJAN makes its own the Pope's appeal to international agencies to

help Church organizations. With its extensive coverage of healthcare in sub-Saharan Africa, the Church has a critical role to play in the UNAIDS *towards zero* strategy.

Justice is an essential component in the AIDS response, envisaged by Pope Benedict "from the whole human family" and from Africa itself. Perhaps we should ask why Africa is bedeviled by this pandemic. We might look at the financial resources available in our countries to deal with the virus. A comparison of many national health and military budgets will quickly show where priorities lie. So let us try to speak to those who have some power to redistribute.

Fr Michael L. Lewis SJ
JESAM President
1 December 2011