

AJANews 96 - World AIDS Day 2010

AJANews is very happy to send you the World AIDS Day 2010 message from the Moderator of JESAM (Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar). Please use it in your community, parish, school or organization, when preparing or marking World AIDS DAY, and make it available to the media and for wider use in the Church and society. If you can translate it for local use, please send **AJANews** a copy. In prayer and solidarity on World AIDS Day!

Message for World AIDS Day, 1 December 2010

“Let the weakest have the lion's share of limited resources”

This year, World AIDS Day is being marked in a worrying scenario: that of waning international engagement in the struggle against the pandemic, reflected in serious funding shortages for life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART).

The African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) has long felt that AIDS is simply not being perceived as an emergency any more. But this global change of approach is not borne out by reality. The pandemic is still spreading: in 2008, 1.9 million people were newly infected in sub-Saharan Africa and 1.4 million people died of AIDS-related complications.

Most countries depend on external sources to meet their treatment costs. Over the past year and more, reports issued by involved agencies have painted a grim picture as donors renege on commitments made and key funding agencies see their funds flat-lined or falling short. The funding shortfall threatens the considerable - but insufficient - progress achieved so far in scaling up treatment in developing countries, where new patients are already being turned away from clinics. There are stockouts, with severe medicine shortages, due to managerial inefficiencies as well as a lack of funding. The obvious culprit for the drop in donor support is the global financial crisis. But flagging political will and AIDS fatigue also play a part.

Let us take the opportunity offered by World AIDS Day to reflect upon the chilling reality of the pandemic and our response. Are we, the Society of Jesus in sub-Saharan Africa, tempted to follow trends, to stop seeing AIDS as a priority, or are we prompted to redouble our efforts to stem the spread of the pandemic and to support those afflicted? Shall we not follow the African wise words of our ancestors, "*Ktondoko kyaava mbisa kikakta duhu*" which means "When the resources are limited the weakest among us gets the lion's share"?

Ours is far from being a solely medical approach; indeed, few of us are engaged in ministries that directly provide treatment. AJAN, which was set up by the Jesuit Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (JESAM) to coordinate its regional struggle against AIDS, has always favoured a holistic way of working that encompasses the spiritual, psychosocial, material and medical needs of those infected and affected. We know full well that they need far more than just medicine to survive. But we also know that without these medicines (ART) few of them will survive.

In a wide range of apostolic settings - parishes, schools and universities, community centres, hospitals, and many others - Jesuits and lay people offer dedicated support and care to people with HIV and their families, and strive to find means of delivering appropriate pro-life and prevention messages. Research and theological reflection offer information and insights that enable this personal life-giving ministry to be conducted more effectively still.

While commending the absolute validity of such an approach, it is also imperative, at this stage, to lend our voice to those expressing growing concern about the diminishing international interest in AIDS. Unreliable or stalled funding could put the supply and scale-up of ART at jeopardy, with unthinkable fatal consequences, even a return to the days when AIDS was a death sentence.

Several Jesuits already advocate so that those they serve may have assured access to treatment. Building on this experience at local, country and continental level, it is time to reflect upon and pursue a course of action, coordinated by AJAN, to advocate for sustained and sustainable funding for treatment for all those whose need is greatest.

At a time when the struggle against AIDS and the very lives of people with HIV and AIDS are threatened by dangerously diminishing international interest, the Society of Jesus in sub-Saharan Africa reiterates its commitment to stand by people in need, as long as they suffer the ravaging consequences of the disease of AIDS. We would want to echo the consoling words from the Gospel of Mark, "Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. 'I do want to,' he answered. 'Be clean!'" Mk 1: 40 - 41.

Fratern Masawe, S.J.
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1/12/2010.