



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

Southern Africa



4th South African AIDS Conference

Statement from Participants of the Inter Faith Pre-Conference and other Faith Communities.*

Faith communities are key role-players in integrated country, regional, continental and global responses to HIV and AIDS. The action of Government, Industry, Business and NGOs will be strengthened by the informed and coherent involvement of faith communities.

Since the beginning of the AIDS pandemic, there have been wonderful stories about faith communities' responses to HIV and AIDS. Sadly though, there have also been many stories of "*Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-action*".**

Coming to the 4th South African AIDS Conference, we as individuals and as organisations from faith communities and organisations, want to register our commitment to the conference theme of '**Scaling up for success**' and offer the key strengths that the faith community brings.

Key Strengths in the Faith Response

✚ Faith Mandate

The universal faith principles of love, care, support, justice and the value placed on life and full well-being engendered a compassionate response to the epidemic.

✚ Spiritual Inspiration

The messages offered by faith communities can offer a strong pillar of hope and resilience, and have the potential to help people make significant life-style changes that reduce their risk of HIV infection.

✚ Holistic Approach

A commitment to holistic approaches lead faith communities to understand the need for global access to prevention, care, treatment, support and social ministry, and encourages ecumenical and interfaith responses.

✚ Extensive Reach and Networks

Faith communities have extensive reach and are broadly represented and deeply rooted in local communities. Their reach and accountability is strengthened by ecumenical and interfaith networking.

✚ Leadership and Public Credibility

Faith leaders are often seen as people of integrity and credibility in their communities. Developing the capacity of faith leaders to respond to the challenges of HIV provides guidance to build compassionate, engaging and competent faith responses.

✚ Experience and Capacity

Faith Communities traditionally defended the promotion of health for all, in particular for the poorest and most vulnerable. This tradition is continued in meeting the needs of individuals,

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families and communities infected and affected by HIV, through skilled human resources, many professional voluntary services, and extensive infrastructure.

🦏 Growing Advocacy

Faith Communities are increasingly involved in ecumenical and interfaith initiatives and alliances with diverse stakeholders, to strengthen advocacy work for just policies and programmes.

As we intensify our efforts, we realize that we need to respond to key challenges related to specific intervention areas such as:

- 🦏 Advocacy,
- 🦏 Prevention,
- 🦏 Caring for Orphans and Children made vulnerable by the epidemic,
- 🦏 Treatment and
- 🦏 Care for those who are living with HIV and AIDS.

To further strengthen the impact of our response, we will increase our focus in dealing with cross-cutting challenges, such as

- 🦏 Poverty,
- 🦏 Inequality,
- 🦏 Gender imbalances and inequality
- 🦏 Dealing with sexual minorities,
- 🦏 Dealing with refugees, and
- 🦏 The meaningful involvement of people living with HIV.

In summary: We as faith communities have improved and strengthened our approaches, teachings and practices in many areas related to HIV and AIDS. In addressing the challenges that remain, we commit to a deeper dialogue and collaboration in and amongst ourselves, strengthened partnerships with other stakeholders, and strong advocacy for a broader compassionate, engaging and competent response.

References:

*This Statement is adapted from the Reflection Statement "*Churches and HIV and AIDS: Challenged or Changed?*" developed at the Pan-African Christian AIDS Network (PACANet) Pre-ICASA Conference, 29 November – 1 December 2008, Dakar.

**Quote from ANARELA+

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