



## SCRIPTURE UNION WEST AFRICA CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT (SUWA)

Yakubu Gowon Way, Opp. Building Materials Market, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Tel: +234 80 37000103,+234 80 23567679

E-mail: [SRUdanyi@aol.com](mailto:SRUdanyi@aol.com).

### Communiqué

#### Pastors/Church Workers' HIV and AIDS Workshop organized by Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA). Miango Rest House, Jos, Nigeria. June 26- July 2, 2006.

#### BACKGROUND

**W**e the undersigned thirty One (31) Church leaders and Civil Society HIV/AIDS workers drawn from various bodies such as Umbrella Christian Networks, Churches of various denominations, Theological Institutions, Civil Society Networks on HIV and AIDS, Christian faith based, and Non Governmental Organizations in Nigeria;

1. **Having** attended a one week HIV and AIDS workshop organized by the Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA), between June 26- July 2, 2006 at Miango Rest Home, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria;
2. **Having** reflected on the HIV and AIDS- its root causes and effects on the citizens of Nigeria, including the Christian community;
3. **Having** discussed other related issues such as HIV and AIDS Prevention Mechanism, Vulnerability of Christian and non Christian communities to the HIV and AIDS, Gender and HIV and AIDS, virtues of the Christian Family, Pastoral Care for People living positively with AIDS, HIV Counseling and Testing, the high Prevalence of HIV and AIDS among Christian Youths, and most importantly the role of the Church in mitigating HIV and AIDS spread in Nigeria;
4. **And having** used the opportunity to fellowship with the Lord God, our Creator through Bible studies, Hymns, Praise and Worship, and Prayers, in order to know His mind on the HIV and AIDS pandemic and His directions for the body of Christ in this regard.

#### *Hereby make the following observations:*

- **Noting** that HIV and AIDS is not the will of God, and by implication, not a judgment of God on sinners. Rather, it is a disease that is stealing our joys, destroying livelihoods, oppressing households, terminating destinies, stunting human growth, and stagnating national development;
- **Noting** that the official HIV Prevalence rate at all levels in Nigeria is grossly deceptive, masks and obscures stark realities in our villages, cities, and even among our congregations;
- **Believing** that every Christian is vulnerable to HIV infection, and that AIDS is already in our congregations;
- **Noting** the efforts of several Christian Non Governmental Organizations and Networks, in combating the HIV and AIDS in Nigeria, but such need to be harmonized in order to increase the visibility of Christian HIV and AIDS focused Civil Groups at national and international fora;

- **Regretting** that some denominations continue to deny the reality of HIV and AIDS, and as a consequence have not been fully involved in HIV and AIDS intervention programmes;
- **Believing** that the incidence and prevalence of HIV and AIDS particularly among Christian communities in Sub Saharan Africa and Nigeria, is a reflection of spiritual decadence; and the failure of the Church to teach, preach and uphold Christian values and ethos of sexual chastity by its youths, and mutual fidelity by married couples;
- **Observing** that there are no institutionalized methods of HIV counseling and testing in most Churches, which leads to the adoption of fire brigade measures, such as mandatory premarital testing;
- **Believing** that the high incidence of HIV and AIDS among Christian families and youths is symptomatic of deep societal ills, including the breakdown of family values;
- **Believing** that there is a strong link between family relationships, parenting, parent-child communication, and HIV and AIDS;
- **Noting** that the high poverty index of most households in Nigeria creates and fosters an enabling environment for the growing spread of HIV and AIDS among the populace;
- **Observing** that the Church in Nigeria has allowed itself to be influenced by negative cultural practices such as wife and property inheritance. This has increased the vulnerability of women and children to HIV and AIDS;
- **Noting** that the way some Church Leaders interpret the Scriptures enhances the vulnerability of the brethren to HIV;
- **Believing**, that God has ever and will ever be in the business of meeting the spiritual and human needs of men, and that Jesus, the Messiah came to save all sinners, rather than to judge or condemn; and
- **Observing** that the over politicization of HIV and AIDS Control agencies at the National and State levels, and the diversion of grants and support intended for faith based programmes, hampers our individual and collective capacity to effectively respond to the epidemic in Nigeria.

***We hereby state and recommend as follows:***

- 1) *We believe that the Church in Nigeria, and indeed worldwide has the capacity to swallow the AIDS monster. The Church is not only the Light of the World but also its' Salt. The HIV and AIDS pandemic is therefore a challenge and an opportunity for the Church to combine its proclamatory and demonstrative roles towards meeting the spiritual and material needs of its communities, including People Living Positively With HIV and AIDS, and affected by AIDS.*
- 2) *As a corollary to the above, we advocate that every Church should initiate an HIV and AIDS ministry without further delay. Churches should commence wholistic responses to this crisis.*
- 3) *The SUWA HIV and AIDS capacity building programme, should consider as one of its priorities the formation of a strong HIV and AIDS Civil Society network, at the National and Sub regional level, in order to harmonize and coordinate the efforts of existing Christian civil bodies working at these levels.*

- 4) *We encourage existing Churches and Christian bodies working on HIV and AIDS, to share resources and information to enhance collective effort.*
- 5) *The Church should continue to uphold the sanctity of the institutions of Marriage, and the Family. The Church in Nigeria is called upon to uncompromisingly and fearlessly promote the Christian values of virginity, Sexual chastity, monogamy, equality of gender, and development of every human being in all spheres of Life.*
- 6) *We encourage organizations working on HIV and AIDS to disseminate accurate, factual, and scientific information/education on Condoms.*
- 7) *To combat stigma and discrimination, the Church in Nigeria should openly talk about AIDS, and make itself a welcome abode for People Living Positively With AIDS. Every Church should conspicuously place a Red Ribbon within its premises, as a sign of commitment in this regard.*
- 8) *The Church should change the Society, the society and its system should not change the Church. In this light, Churches should preach and advocate against ungodly practices that dehumanize womanhood and increases their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.*
- 9) *Churches should impact life skills education on its teenagers and youths, to enable them effectively cope with the challenges of living responsibly in a spiritually decadent, and morally depraved generation.*
- 10) *We call on all Churches to launch a campaign against indecent dressing, particularly among its youths. Beyond this, Churches should integrate sex and sexuality education into its sermons and programmes.*
- 11) *Churches should keep their youths occupied in useful endeavours and empower them through skills acquisition training, discipleship, provision of micro credits, and organization of various programmes.*
- 12) *The Church should create an avenue for communication and interactions with the youths, such as establishing Youth friendly centers. The Culture of seeing the Child and not being heard should stop.*
- 13) *Children are the priority of God. The Church in Nigeria has a spiritual mandate to pray for orphaned children and Children at risk. We encourage Churches to establish agencies to take care of Children at risk, as well as advocate for the enforcement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*
- 14) *Mandatory premarital HIV testing without pre and post counselling is counter productive. God gives choices between good and evil and never forces His will on people. Churches should draw up Marriage guidelines which may include confidential Pastoral Counseling and voluntary HIV testing, and educate its members in this respect. HIV testing should be seen as a benefit.*
- 15) *Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT), or HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) is the gateway to all HIV and AIDS intervention. We encourage every Christian household to go for VCCT and know their HIV status. God expects us to be informed.*
- 16) *Participants appreciate the role of the Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA) in facilitating this workshop and giving us an opportunity to acquire knowledge and rub minds on this human tragedy. We sincerely believe that this One week workshop has succeeded in equipping and mobilizing us to step up our responses to HIV and AIDS within our congregations.*

- 17) *SUWA should continue to play its leadership role in Nigeria and within the West African sub region on HIV and AIDS issues, particularly building the capacity of Churches and Christian bodies to appropriately and effectively respond to the pandemic. Churches should encourage their personnel to benefit from such Capacity Building Initiatives.*

## **Communiqué**

### **Pastors/Church Workers' Workshop organized by Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA).**

**Miango Rest House, Jos, Nigeria. June 26- July 2, 2006.**

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**Sam O. Udanyi**

*Coordinator*

Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA)  
Capacity Building Project

[srudanyi@yahoo.com](mailto:srudanyi@yahoo.com) 08037000103

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**Pastor Mike Akpami**

*Chairman,*

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)  
Action Committee on AIDS,

Abuja – FCT

[pastormikeakpami@yahoo.com](mailto:pastormikeakpami@yahoo.com) 08033205393

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**Paul B. D. Mershak**

*Chairman,*

Nigeria Christian AIDS Network (NICAN),  
National Headquarter, Jos,

Plateau State

[merpbd@yahoo.com](mailto:merpbd@yahoo.com) 08033975591

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**Babatope Babalobi**

*Coordinator,*

Christian Coalition on AIDS, Nigeria

[blfnigeria@yahoo.com](mailto:blfnigeria@yahoo.com) 08035897435