

Religious Leaders Meeting: Fulfilling Our Commitment that “Together We Must Do More”
Toronto, Canada
29-30 November 2011

Points of Agreement

Assessment of the Fulfillment of the Personal Commitment and the aim of the High Level Summit (March 2010) that “Together We Must Do More”

The Report on the Fulfillment of the Personal Commitment to Action provides indications of tremendous positive work and learning.

We will actively seek ways to mobilize religious and faith leaders to responsibly share their actions and reflections more widely and to engage in further visible efforts.

We recognize that the report is not and cannot be comprehensive, but it does provide an important snapshot of activities and reflections that will help us move forward in drawing lessons learned and measuring impact.

There are also significant areas of concern, such as the lack of a mechanism to assess quality and impact.

Recommendations for the Way Forward

The personal commitment is a helpful tool to engage a wide range of religious leaders. But those who commit must be ready to do what they commit to, and be empowered and equipped to carry it out.

We need to continue to develop ways to support and assist religious leaders in their work on HIV, and provide a mechanism to capture their actions, concerns and needs, including a regular (18 month) reporting mechanism.

Beyond the personal commitment

We must address the difficult issues, not just the “easy” ones. We recognize that this is a long-term process through dialogue, but the need is urgent and we must commit the effort, time and resources. Religious leaders, including those living with HIV, together with the wider community of people living with HIV, need to think through views on sexuality, human rights and human dignity, and gender equality.

We know that we need to continue to build awareness among faith leaders and communities about the dimensions of HIV and the impact of the virus and our actions.

We also must build capacity among religious and spiritual leaders to support effective efforts to respond to the realities in their communities.

Framework for dialogue between religious leaders and PLHIV networks

Developing personal connections and trust between religious leaders and people living with HIV is vital. Frameworks for dialogue between religious leaders and people living with HIV can bring together many opportunities:

- A way to “re-energize” how the commitment is implemented, and what stories and actions inform the next round of reporting and development of good policy and practice.
- A way to use evidence such as the PLHIV Stigma Index to inform action and initiate dialogue
- A way to understand and address the difficult issues that still face us as local, regional and global communities

Crucial Steps for Effective Engagement by Religious Leaders

An urgent response is essential. We are impatient that more progress has not been made. Lack of progress means lost lives. Further mechanisms and actions are required. We need to find ways – together with other religious leaders and collaboratively with other stakeholders - to:

- Speak and support acceptance with respect, in particular for those most affected by the epidemic in our communities.
- Link to and address the underlying factors to the HIV pandemic (e.g., structural injustice, gender, poverty).
- Talk about science and faith. Have a dialogue with the medical community and how we can work together. Seek clarity on the important mutual role of spirituality and medical treatment.
- Develop a language that conveys what we want to achieve together.
- Be more inclusive of religious traditions in our collaborative actions and dialogue.
- Further support networking among religious leaders as well as with other stakeholders, for dialogue, learning and action.
- Further support and provide connections to help mobilize women of faith in addressing the critical issues around the HIV pandemic.
- Help define “spiritual care,” as for the first time in a global political document on health, the 2011 UN Political Declaration on HIV, spirituality is mentioned.

The Global Political Commitment

Our meeting was galvanized by the dramatic drop in funding to support effective HIV responses, including to the Global Fund. We are very aware that reduced funding translates immediately to lost lives and devastated families and communities. We know this will have huge and direct impact in the communities where we come from.

We call on our own faith communities to mobilize and commit resources towards a sustainable HIV response.

As we ourselves recommit to deeper and more active engagement in the HIV response, we call on donor and recipient governments to fulfill their promises and provide the sustainable financial resources to reach the goal in the 2011 Political Declaration that we now see as attainable – zero deaths, zero new infections and zero stigma and discrimination.