

Inter-faith statement calls for increased partnership

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[WCC] Thirteen Christian, Jewish, Muslim and inter-faith organizations have endorsed a statement for the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on HIV/AIDS, which is currently taking place in New York. The statement, which was facilitated by the World Council of Churches (WCC), calls for increased partnership between faith-based organizations, governments and inter-governmental organizations.

"Faith-based organizations are rooted in local structures and are therefore in an excellent position to mobilize communities to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis," the document argues. Yet the experience of the faith-based organizations is that they "are often overlooked".

The statement therefore calls upon governments:

- to extensively support faith-based organizations through access to information, training and financial resources;
- to acknowledge and promote the importance of community involvement in prevention efforts and health care;
- to continue all efforts of debt relief of highly indebted countries and "to make sure that a significant proportion of the released funds are used for the fight against HIV/AIDS";
- to make "serious efforts to overcome global economic inequalities";
- to ensure access to life-saving drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, to reduce the prices of patented drugs' generic production, and to support the production of generic drugs in highly affected countries.

Moreover, "UNAIDS and other UN organizations should involve faith-based organizations in the planning, implementation and monitoring of HIV/AIDS programmes at local, national and international levels".

In their joint statement, the endorsing organizations promote HIV prevention strategies such as temporary abstinence, delayed sexual activity in young people, voluntary testing and counselling, mutual faithfulness in sexual relationships, and the use of condoms.

The statement also urges religious leaders, to ensure that "leaders and members at all levels are conscientized and trained about HIV/AIDS prevention and care" and that programmes are put in place that "would eliminate traditional and cultural inequalities that exacerbate the vulnerability of women and children".

Although the endorsing faith-based organizations realize that they "cannot claim to speak for all world religions and religious organizations", they express in the document "their sincere commitment to continue to work within our own communities for the dignity and rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, for an attitude of care and solidarity that rejects all forms of stigma and discrimination, for an open atmosphere of dialogue in which the sensitive root causes of HIV/AIDS can be addressed, and for a strong advocacy to mobilize all the necessary resources for an effective global response to the pandemic".

The statement by faith-based organizations has been endorsed and supported by:

Anglican Communion

Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid in the Netherlands

Christian Aid, UK

Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) - Office for Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad

Institute for Islamic Studies, Mumbai India

International Christian AIDS Network

International Council of Jewish Women, UK

Presbyterian Church USA - International Health Ministries Office

Religion Counts, interfaith organization based in Washington, D.C.o;

United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India;

World Conference on Religion and Peace

World Council of Churches (WCC)

World Vision International

The statement by faith-based organizations is available on <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/ny-statement.html>

Members of the WCC delegation:

Dr Christoph Benn, Co-ordinator of the Ecumenical Team facilitated by the WCC, Germany

Rev. Gideon Bymugisha, Anglican Church of Uganda

Dr Manoj Kurian, Programme Executive for Health and Healing, WCC

Sr. Patricia Walsh, International Christian AIDS Network, Zimbabwe