



**Statement of Commitment
By Religious Leaders
15th International AIDS Conference
Bangkok, Thailand – 15 July 2004**

The tragic toll of the of HIV and AIDS pandemic, as well as its continuous and rapid spread in most parts of the world, brings compelling urgency to the call for new commitment by people of faith to the goal of “Access for All”.

The HIV and AIDS crisis is bringing us together because we are all living with HIV and AIDS. We need to share knowledge, understanding and experience from our various religious communities so that our efforts become more and more effective and inclusive. Through this, we will seek to establish a new culture of interfaith co-operation, respecting the uniqueness within our traditions while focusing on our shared values of human dignity and human rights.

Have religious communities done enough to respond to the urgent challenges posed by HIV and AIDS to individuals, communities, and the global human family? NO! *As leaders in religious communities*, assembled for the 15th International AIDS Conference, in Bangkok, on 11-16 July 2004, we acknowledge with much regret that quite often our response has been one of prejudice, ignorance, fear, and judgemental attitudes.

We are determined to work together and within our communities to:

- Promote the dignity, equality, and rights of all people;
- Discuss openly and accurately the basic facts about the HIV and AIDS and about all effective means of prevention;
- Work to eliminate the root causes of the HIV and AIDS pandemic including gender inequality, prejudice against those whose way of life or sexual orientation is different from the majority community, systemic injustice, and unequal distribution of wealth;
- Overcome silence, stigma, discrimination, denial, and fear regarding HIV and AIDS;
- Reject the negative statements by some faith leaders that AIDS is a form of divine punishment or retribution ;
- Advocate for expanded resources to fight against HIV and AIDS;
- Document “good practices” and support research to identify more effective means of prevention and treatment;
- Attain “access for all” – to effective preventive education and knowledge, comprehensive care and treatment, and full inclusion in the community.

Our religious communities bring rich experience and unique strengths to fulfill these commitments. Specifically, we will carry out the following actions:

- ***We will implement policies within our structures and institutions in order to combat every tendency to marginalize people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS as either employees or members within our communities.***

- *We will advocate for and with people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS in order to obtain lower prices for both medications and laboratory tests and to ensure access to the full range of education, counselling, voluntary testing, and care.*
- *We will call upon those holding political office, in collaboration with all members of the global human family, to fulfil the grave responsibility to make the dream of “Access for All” into an everyday reality in all parts of the world, among all groups of people, and to address the issues underlying the spread of the pandemic, including sexual abuse, domestic violence, trafficking, and conflict, and at every level of the socio-economic spectrum and to maintain strict, enhanced and transparent accountability in this regard.*
- *We will ensure, through educational activities and community gatherings, the inclusion of accurate information about ways to prevent the further spread of HIV.*
- *We will commit our diverse structures of health care, ranging from highly specialized services to locally-based village clinics, as well as our systems of education, social and community development, to implement these strategies in a comprehensive, universal, and equitable manner.*
- *We will dedicate additional funds from the resources of our own religious communities in order to scale up our respective contributions to the struggle against the HIV pandemic, and pledge careful accountability for the funds entrusted to us.*
- *We will involve people living with or directly affected by HIV, many of whom are members of our own religious communities, in the response to this pandemic.*
- *We will give priority attention addressing the practices within our religious traditions that increase the vulnerability of women and girls who also carry the greatest burden of response in this pandemic.*
- *We will promote community-based responses to the special needs of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS.*
- *We will promote preaching and teaching about HIV in our houses of worship and will encourage the designation of special days and/or weeks of prayer and other religious observances to focus on HIV and AIDS.*
- *We commit ourselves to monitor and evaluate our own progress toward accomplishing the goals that we have articulated in this statement;*

HIV and AIDS knows no boundaries. All of our religious communities are living with HIV and AIDS, and yet a common thread in our beliefs is hope inspired by faith. We will not rest until the promise of “Access for all” and the hope of a world without HIV and AIDS is fulfilled.