



Issue Brief: Global HIV/AIDS

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“We know how to ameliorate this epidemic. We have the medical means; we can muster the economic means. The question we must ask ourselves now is whether we have the will to do it. And that becomes a moral -- a religious -- question.”

-UUA President Rev. William G. Sinkford

Introduction

HIV/AIDS may be the worst humanitarian crisis the world has ever faced. Worldwide, over 40 million people are infected with HIV, but this disease disproportionately affects poor countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where the death rate is 5,800 per day. Economic development will never take hold when the current generation of parents and workers is dying and the next generation is being orphaned and left to fend for itself. We have no cure for the virus, but HIV is 100% preventable and increased support for prevention would save lives and stem the epidemic. The Unitarian Universalist Association has long advocated for medically-accurate, practical, and comprehensive sexuality education to prevent the spread of HIV.

We know that anyone can be HIV positive regardless of gender, age, income, sexual orientation, nationality, or racial group. However, groups that are marginalized within our society and our world as a whole are made more vulnerable to this disease because of the lack of resources available to them, such as education, health care, and finances. It is our shared responsibility as people of faith to challenge the structures and worldviews that prevent marginalized groups from realizing their own rights, power, and potential and allow this disease to flourish.

Recognizing that the crisis has reached unprecedented proportions and will continue to escalate until a major international effort is undertaken to stop the spread of the virus and address the underlying social and economic conditions that have allowed HIV/AIDS to spiral out of control thus far, the General Assembly of 2003 issued an Action of Immediate Witness to bring attention to the issue and urge our member congregations to take action.

Current Situation

In his State of the Union speech in January 2003, President Bush announced a 5-year, \$15 billion initiative to fight the disease, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Since that announcement Congress has appropriated an unprecedented amount of unilateral aid for international HIV/AIDS programs. Each year has seen funding levels increase and with PEPFAR up for reauthorization next year, Bush has announced intentions to officially double the funding levels for the next five years.

Unfortunately this increased funding has come with harmful restrictions around commercial sex workers, abstinence-only education, and the use of generic medications. The UUA has chosen to focus its advocacy efforts on repealing the requirement that 1/3rd of US prevention funding be spent on abstinence-until-marriage programs.

Current Legislation

View the full text of these bills at the Library of Congress website: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

The bipartisan **PATHWAY Act of 2007 (Protection Against Transmission of HIV for Women and Youth Act of 2007), H.R. 1713**, introduced by Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congressman Chris Shays as H.R.1713, would require the President and the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) to establish a comprehensive and integrated HIV prevention strategy to address the vulnerabilities of women and girls to HIV infection and would strike the earmark requiring that one-third (1/3) of all prevention funding be dedicated to abstinence-until-marriage programs.

The HIV Prevention Act of 2007, introduced by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), is the Senate companion of the PATHWAY Act. In addition to striking the abstinence earmark it allows for greater flexibility within PEPFAR to respond more quickly and specifically to the local epidemic, and supports public health best practices that are tailored to local needs and culture.

Talking Points

As a person of faith I support efforts to repeal the 33% abstinence-until-marriage earmark because:

- Evidence has shown that “abstinence-until-marriage” prevention programming is not nearly as effective at preventing new HIV infections as are comprehensive prevention programs. By refusing to fund effective prevention programs, the United States is putting an ideology before the well being of the world’s population.
- Marriage is not a protection from HIV infection; women must be empowered with accurate information, enabling them to negotiate and demand safe sexual practices both within and outside of marriage.
- Youth are beings of conscience that are capable of making responsible decisions if given accurate and complete information about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, the means of transmission, and all available prevention methods.

Contacting Congress

Write: The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Call: The Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your representative.

Email: Check for congress members’ websites at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov

Fax: Look-up your member’s fax number on their website. **Note: For security reasons, please consider faxing your letter if it concerns a time-sensitive matter.**

Other ways to take action are:

- Visiting your Congress members in Washington DC or in their home district offices.
- Having a letter-writing table at coffee hour.
- **Generating MEDIA!** Send a letter to the editor or op-ed to your local paper.
- Signing up for the Washington Office’s online action center at www.uua.org/socialjustice

Further Resources:

PEPFAR Watch
<http://www.pepfarwatch.org>

Advocates for Youth
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org>

UU Global AIDS Coalition
<http://www.uuglobalaids.org>

For more information on Global HIV/AIDS, contact Adam G. Gerhardstein in the UUA Washington Office at LA_International@uua.org or (202) 296-4672 x 21