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CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS

In marking World AIDS Day on 1 December on the theme, *Universal Access and Human Rights*, CCSJ thanks God for the gift of life. To achieve developed nation status our nation must bring to the market place a moral vision that is consistent with a culture of life – one that seeks to respect, preserve, protect, defend, and enhance life at all stages and in all circumstances rather than crush it.

UNAIDS estimates that there are currently 33.2 million people in the world living with HIV, including 2.5 million children.

Faced with the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is important that we reflect on how we are responding to the various needs that exist.

There is still no known cure for HIV or for AIDS, but antiretroviral medicines can keep the level of HIV low. In 2008 it is estimated that about 9.5 million people needed antiretroviral therapy.

Although many people still cannot afford the necessary medicines, a new report entitled: *Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector*, ([Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector](#)), launched on 30 September, 2009 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), highlights the fact that "more than 4 million people in low-and middle-income countries were receiving antiretroviral therapy at the close of 2008, representing a 36% increase in one year and a ten-fold increase over five years."

CCSJ notes that the WHO Director-General, Margaret Chan said at the launch: "This report shows tremendous progress in the global HIV/AIDS response. But we need to do more. At least 5 million people living with HIV still do not have access to life-prolonging treatment and care. Prevention

services fail to reach many in need. Governments and international partners must accelerate their efforts to achieve universal access to treatment."

Pope Benedict XVI said in his recent Encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, that globalisation makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers or sisters. We must work harder to build fraternal societies. We are all made in the image and likeness of God. The social justice principle of solidarity requires us to see Christ in the face of persons with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS affects all of us in one way or another. As the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers stated:

"Amongst the very many Lazaruses who knock at the door of our society there are innumerable direct or indirect victims of HIV/AIDS - the sick people themselves, their relatives, widowers, widows and orphans."

CCSJ calls on the wider community, including faith-based groups, the public and private sectors, NGOs, and CBOs to play our part in the fight against HIV/AIDS including making renewed efforts to eliminate public and private discrimination, hostility, condemnation and indifference to those suffering from this disease.

Let us demonstrate respect for life and for the dignity and worth of each human being, including our brothers and sisters who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. We must not forget the financial, mental, physical, spiritual, social and other needs of persons with HIV/AIDS.

Let us fulfil our duty to reach out to our neighbours in need and create welcoming, caring, compassionate communities for all God's people. And in our efforts to combat AIDS, let us do as the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said and "attack diseases of the human spirit – prejudice, discrimination, and stigma."

Good governance is characterised, for example, as being responsive and inclusive. A key element of democracy is the protection of the human rights of all citizens – as enshrined in international law and in our Constitution. The Preamble of T&T's Constitution affirms that our Nation is founded upon principles that, inter alia, acknowledge fundamental human rights.

We call on our Government to promote integral human development; to review our laws, policies, practices and programmes as they relate to persons

with HIV/AIDS, as well as to persons at risk of infection, to ensure that they have access to prevention, treatment, care and support and that their human rights are protected.

We agree with the World AIDS Campaign Chairperson, Allyson Leacock, who has said: “The Human Rights theme (for World AIDS Day) is about us, about communities, about people like you and me and our governments making a commitment to honour and respect the dignity of the vulnerable and to those already living with HIV.”

We call on parents, principals, teachers and TTUTA to work together with the Ministry of Education to develop a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS in the nation’s schools.

Let us offer up our prayers for the health and well-being of those infected. Remember, as Pope John Paul II said when he visited AIDS patients in the USA in 1989:

“God loves you all, without distinction, without limit ... He loves those of you who are sick, those suffering from AIDS. He loves the friends and relatives of the sick and those who care for them. He loves all with an unconditional and everlasting love.”

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