

DECLARATION ON HIV/AIDS

Written for the first WYA International Solidarity Forum, the WYA Declaration on HIV/AIDS challenges the international community to respond to the grave epidemic of HIV/AIDS in a way that respects the dignity of the person. Such an approach recognizes the ability of the person to effect change and seeks to remedy the underlying societal factors that create conditions which place vulnerable populations at greater risk.

We, young people throughout the world, affirm that every human person possesses intrinsic and inviolable dignity. We believe this dignity obliges the international community to foster those conditions most conducive to the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth of all persons. We thus commit to working in solidarity with the international community to support the integral development of every person amidst the brutality of HIV/AIDS:

We affirm that the family is the most fundamental community wherein dignity, rights, and duties are first realized, through love as self-gift. We believe, moreover, that the family is the primary structure within which HIV/AIDS prevention begins, and care and support is provided. It is thus incumbent upon the international community to foster those conditions that support and nurture the family. As HIV/AIDS leaves persons, especially children, lacking family support, society must respond by providing alternative support. These alternative support structures, by cultivating opportunity for friendship and appreciation of culture, truth, and beauty, must support the integral development of those persons whose families are torn by HIV/AIDS;

Whereas the international community, obliged to extend aid in proportion to need, must allocate resources of the highest quality to protecting the basic needs of dying, hungry, impoverished, exploited, and abused persons. Considering the world's capacity to provide medication, particularly anti-retroviral therapies, to reduce persons' suffering, the international community must devote human energy and resources to meet this need. Considering that HIV transmission continues to occur as a result of unsafe health care practice, the international community must devote human energy and resources to improving health care. This includes the commitment of human energy and resources to counseling and treatment that reduce the risk of mother-to-child-transmission, and that uphold respect for the dignity of the mother and child;

Whereas uncertainty regarding HIV infection perpetuates risk of transmission and forestalls effective treatment, the international community must devote human energy and resources to ensuring that voluntary and confidential counseling and testing services are made accessible to all persons. Testing and counseling access should be widely encouraged and recommended;

Whereas comprehensive HIV/AIDS education is critical to effective prevention, considering that casual sexual relations involve a risk of HIV transmission, and that casual sexual relations tend toward the objectification of the human person, we implore the international community to give priority to encouragement of abstinence and mutual fidelity within a permanent commitment. Condom education must never divert attention from the obligation to promote abstinence and mutual fidelity within a permanent commitment;

Whereas abandoned children, drug users, women and men involved in prostitution, and prisoners are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, we believe specialized prevention, treatment, care, and support programs can help protect persons of such groups. Considering the vulnerability of these persons, it is critical to sustainable integral development that the international community confront in a steadfast manner those underlying societal forces that tend toward poverty, malnutrition, susceptibility to chronic illness, conflict, unemployment, illiteracy, sexual exploitation, sexual objectification of the person, drug abuse, and every manifestation of disregard for human dignity.

In the midst of devastating physical, mental, and emotional suffering, social stigma, and discrimination that persons with HIV/AIDS must endure, we believe it is through the broadest recognition and respect for the intrinsic and inviolable dignity of the human person that the international community will succeed in supporting the integral development of all persons.