

Statement of Commitment by Lesotho's Church Leaders on AIDS

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (1 Corinthians 12: 26-27)

The tragic toll of the AIDS epidemic, as well as its continuous and rapid spread in Lesotho, brings compelling urgency to the call for new commitment by people of faith to the goal of "Universal Access for All to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support including impact mitigation".

The 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 united efforts become more effective and inclusive. Through this, we will seek to establish a new culture of ecumenical and interfaith co-operation, respecting the uniqueness within our traditions while focusing on our shared values of human dignity and human rights.

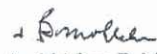
We are determined to work together and within our communities to:

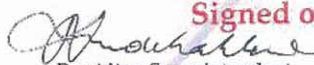
- Promote the dignity, equality, and rights of all people, especially those living with HIV;
- Discuss openly and accurately the basic facts about HIV and AIDS, and about all effective means of HIV prevention;
- Work to eliminate the root causes of the AIDS epidemic including gender inequality, social and cultural norms such as having multiple concurrent sexual partners, sexual abuse, 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 AIDS; and encourage people to know their HIV status on a regular basis;
- Reject the negative statements by some church leaders that AIDS is a form of divine punishment or retribution or that there is a cure currently available;
- Advocate for expanded resources to fight against AIDS;
- Document "good practices" and support research to identify more effective means of prevention and treatment;
- Attain "universal access for all in Lesotho" - to effective HIV preventive education and knowledge, comprehensive care and treatment, impact mitigation and full inclusion in the community.

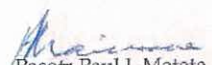
Specifically, we will carry out the following actions:


- We will implement policies within our structures and institutions in order to combat every tendency to marginalize people living with or affected by HIV as either employees or members within our communities.
- We will advocate for and with people living with HIV in order to obtain both medications and laboratory tests and to ensure access to the full range of education, counselling, voluntary HIV testing and counselling, 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 "Universal access for All in Lesotho" into an everyday reality, 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.
- We will ensure, through educational activities and community gatherings, the inclusion of accurate information about ways to prevent the further spread of HIV, especially around abstinence and delay in onset of sexual debut and promotion of mutual fidelity, reduction of the number of sexual partners and comprehensive and appropriate sexual education.
- 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 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 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 AIDS.
- We commit ourselves to monitor and evaluate our own progress toward accomplishing the goals that we have articulated in this statement.


Signed on the 11th July, 2007



Archbishop B. Mohlalali
Roman Catholic Church

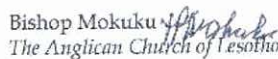

Presiding Superintendent
Rev. Rapelang Mokhehlane
Lesotho Evangelical Church


Pastor Paul L. Matete
Seventh Day Adventist

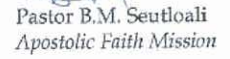

Superintendent
Pastor Ntsonyane
Assemblies of God



Rev. Daniel Rantle
Methodist Church of Africa


Rev. Daniel Ratube
The African Methodist Episcopal



Bishop Mokuku
The Anglican Church of Lesotho


Bishop Michael Kolisang
Fill the Gap

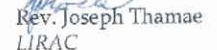

Pastor B.M. Seutloali
Apostolic Faith Mission


Pastor Dube
Word of Life


Pastor David Jika
Christian Revival Church


Bishop Daniel Makutsokane
Soul Winning


Bishop Ratsoane
Lutheran Evangelical


Rev. Joseph Thamae
LIRAC