

3rd Interfaith Forum on HIV & AIDS in Nigeria Opening Ceremony

28 August 2007, Shehu Musa Yar'adua Center, Abuja

Goodwill message by Dr. Warren Naamara, UNAIDS Country Coordinator

PROTOCOL

Distinguished participants,

I am pleased and honoured to pronounce a goodwill message to this eminent gathering on the occasion of the opening of the 3rd Interfaith Forum on HIV & AIDS in Nigeria.

Religious leaders, as prominent, trusted and respected members of society, are role models by excellence. Your influence on opinions, policies, practices and attitudes reaches from the grassroots and remote communities to the very top level of government and decision-makers. Your compassion and support has always embraced the disenchanted and the vulnerable, the sick, the children and the weak in need of assistance.

When the faith community now decides to use its strengths to act against HIV and AIDS, the national response to the epidemic will greatly benefit from the involvement of the most numerous and influential constituency in Nigeria.

Your speaking out against stigma and discrimination, against rejection and marginalization of People Living with HIV, will make a world of difference to the everyday life of people infected, within and beyond their religious communities.

Your sharing of knowledge and information will contribute to the Nigerian population moving beyond AIDS awareness, to in-depth knowledge on the disease and its transmission and ultimately to adoption of safe behaviours.

Your engaging in activities of care, treatment and support for people infected and affected will enable their positive living and increase their quality of life.

Your encouraging your congregations to access the services for confidential and voluntary counseling and HIV testing, will motivate your communities to know their HIV status, while assuring them of non-discriminatory support in case they test positive.

I would like to congratulate the National Faith-Based Advisory Committee on AIDS and the National Agency for the Control of AIDS with the holding of this third Forum. It is a privileged moment to take stock of the achievements of the faith community in the AIDS response and to chart the way forward for the next two years.

UNAIDS and the United Nations are honoured to be associated with the Forum and we will continue our intense collaboration as we pledge our further support to the implementation of the meeting outcomes.

I wish you a fruitful meeting.