

## Reflection - AIDS

**In this blog the Archbishop of Canterbury reflects on what has been achieved in the global response to HIV/AIDS, and what challenges remain**



Recently I had the privilege of discussing the issue of HIV/AIDS with the Archbishops of Southern Africa and Burundi, and the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé. It was encouraging hearing how much has been achieved in the global response to HIV/AIDS, yet sobering to see what challenges remain.

Last year there were 35 million people living with HIV, according to UNAIDS. New infections are down by 33% since 2001 and new infections in children down by 52%. Millions more people can now access treatment so they can live full and active lives. As a result, AIDS-related deaths have reduced by 29% since 2005. This is a hugely significant advance. It makes clear that we have the means and must maintain the commitment, as a global community, to ensure that no one is left behind in the progress on prevention and treatment.

It was also inspiring hearing how churches in Burundi and Southern Africa are responding to HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. Both Churches have long-standing

programmes on HIV/AIDS. In Burundi the Anglican Church is also working with local communities to overcome violence against women and girls. Just last month the Anglican Church of Southern Africa joined other faith groups to launch their 'We Will Speak Out' campaign against sexual violence. As I write, churches in many parts of the Anglican Communion are involved in the 16 Days of Action against Gender-based Violence, responding in study, prayer and outreach. The Mothers' Union [has launched a creative initiative for the 16 Days](#), which I gladly commend. These issues are being tackled with enormous determination and immense imagination.

In my discussion with the Archbishops, we reflected on three vital aspects of the work on HIV/AIDS. One is the importance of equal access to treatment for all in need, including in the poorest and most marginalised communities.

That is absolutely at the heart of any Christian understanding and response to HIV/AIDS.

Second is the huge danger posed by gender-based sexual violence, and particularly in areas of conflict. This is something which the Great Lakes region has experienced, with terrible suffering and consequences. But it is a very real and often unrecognised outrage in almost every part of the world.

The third matter is perhaps the most sensitive. This is the importance of ensuring that no groups – and here I'm clearly thinking about LGTB groups – face discrimination which creates barriers to accessing testing and treatment.

What emerged from our conversation was a clear sense that churches and other faith groups have a vital role to play in breaking the silence around HIV and sexual

violence, in challenging stigma and discrimination, and in joining forces with governments and other sectors of society to achieve a world free from the suffering created by HIV.

In God's eyes no one is invisible - so no one should be left behind in the response to HIV/AIDS. I pray for a time when we will no longer need a World AIDS Day, except as an act of faithful and loving remembrance.

*A video featuring Archbishop Justin in conversation with the Archbishops of Southern Africa and Burundi about HIV/AIDS will be published shortly.*

- See more at: [http://  
www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/  
blog.php/19/reflections-on-world-  
aids-day#sthash.uX86BiXo.dpuf](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/blog.php/19/reflections-on-world-aids-day#sthash.uX86BiXo.dpuf)