

## **Caritas: Funding Gap Sets AIDS Fight 20 Years Back**

### **Calls on Catholic Conscience in Pandemic Battle**

VIENNA, Austria, JULY 20, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- As experts from around the world gather in Vienna to discuss the fight against AIDS, Caritas is warning that a lack of funding could put the campaign 20 years back.

The International AIDS Conference began Sunday and will run through Friday. A Catholic pre-conference networking event brought people from 23 countries together for two days previous to the AIDS conference currently underway.

At the Catholic event, Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Caritas Internationalis special representative on HIV and AIDS, spoke about the need for more funding to provide universal access to care.

It is estimated that \$27 million is needed this year alone to fight the pandemic, and that a third of these costs will not be met, the agency noted.

Monsignor Vitillo reported that people are already being turned away from treatment facilities in countries such as Uganda, due to the lack of funds.

He warned that "neglecting HIV and AIDS will put millions of human lives at risk in poor countries."

"If people don't have access to treatment," the priest continued, "we will return to the 1980s where there weren't enough hospital beds and people were dying without receiving any care."

Caritas expressed concern that children in particular will be affected by the cutbacks.

The Caritas "HAART [Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy] for Children" campaign is calling for better testing and treatment for children with HIV and TB in poor countries. The agency noted that without this medication for children with HIV, one half of that population will die before their second birthday.

The campaign workers gathered 20,000 signatures on a petition that will be given to an Austrian government representative. Monsignor Vitillo explained that these signatures demonstrate the concern of the Austrian people for those living with AIDS in developing countries.

Catholic approach

Caritas Secretary General Lesley-Anne Knight also addressed the participants of the pre-conference Catholic networking event.

She said that "the three Cs -- compassion, communion, and conscience -- should underline a Catholic approach that fosters dialogue, cooperation, and an openness on how best to respond to the AIDS pandemic."

Knight affirmed, "Our compassion needs to extend to people who are marginalized by society: to groups such as injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers, and prison populations."

"This presents us with the challenge of coming to terms with the realities of life for people within these groups," she continued. "We need to be able to feel their suffering too and develop realistic solutions that will be effective in these diverse, difficult and complex contexts."

"As Catholics we have much to share, but we also have an opportunity to listen and to learn," Knight stated.

She added, "If we are to end the stigma of HIV infection and promote effective prevention strategies, we need to be able to enter into frank and honest dialogue about what are sometimes difficult issues for us to talk about."

"As faith-based organizations," Knight said, "we can appeal to the global conscience. We can promote the concept of one humanity and the idea that it is clearly wrong to do nothing while others suffer."

She observed that "the development of a 'global conscience' is an important factor in putting pressure on our international institutions and governments to honor their commitments in tackling the HIV pandemic."

Knight added, "It can also influence pharmaceutical companies to play their part in providing accessible affordable treatments."