

What can you do?

- Support the Stephen Lewis Foundation and its work.
- Advocate for increased commitment on HIV/AIDS by G8 leaders.
- Support union initiatives that address HIV/AIDS (i.e. OPSEU/NUPGE's Live and Let Live Fund / CLC Labour Fund for HIV/AIDS).

Links:

www.nupge.ca/issues/aids.htm

www.stephenlewisfoundation.org

www.savethechildren.org

www.hopeforafricanchildren.org



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

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Health Sciences Association of Alberta
Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union
Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
Ontario Public Service Employees Union
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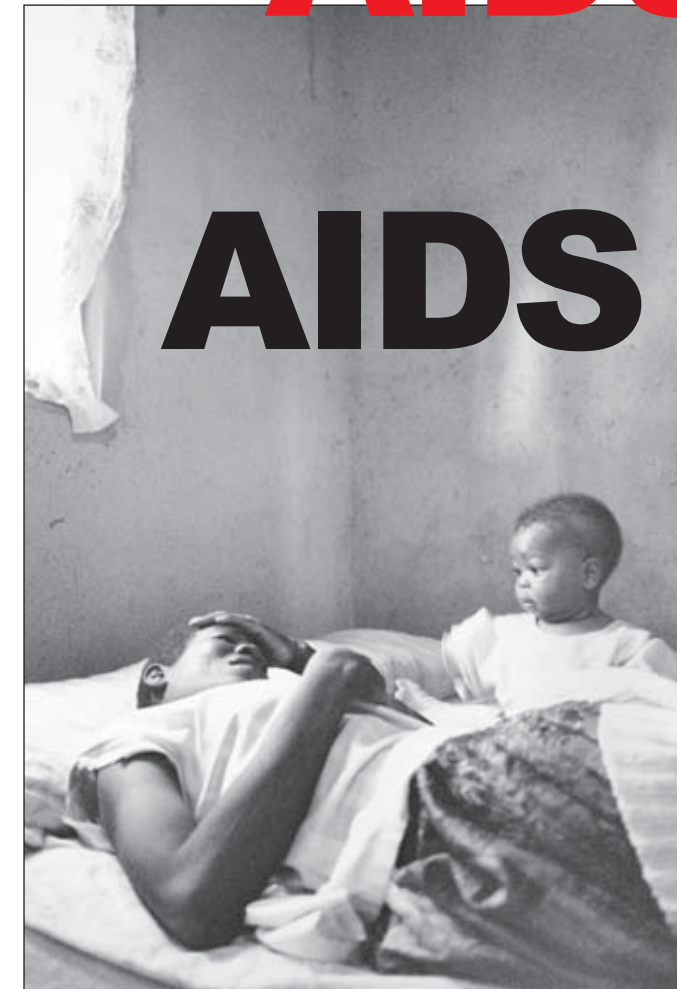
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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services



AIDS



The Plight of Women and Children in Africa

Ottawa, 2003



HIV/AIDS

It's not about numbers and dollars. It's about real people—with names and faces.



However, events in Africa attract little attention unless thousands or tens of thousands of deaths are involved. Yet each tragedy is the tragedy of one person's life.

African women and children have been particularly hard hit by HIV/AIDS. At least half of all infected adults are women, ages 15-49; in some countries more than 25 percent of pregnant women are infected. Over 90 percent of all AIDS orphans are African.

When more than ten percent of a population is orphaned, there is a need which transcends culture, society, government, church and home. When the world loses massive numbers of people, there are survivors which are neglected and abandoned.

Africa continues to dwarf the rest of the world on the AIDS balance sheet. There are 40 million HIV positive people in sub-Saharan Africa. With little hope that medication will be available, one can presume there will be 40 million deaths within the next ten years. This number alone is tragic enough; yet, it is expected that these individuals will leave, on average, one to two orphans each. Based on these estimates, Africa will have 40 - 80 million orphans roaming homeless, without care or protection and seeking survival by any means they can find.

Medical care for AIDS in Africa is often reduced to little more than aspirin, cough syrup and basic antibiotics. Not very powerful weapons against a virus that is wiping out an entire generation in Africa - and leaving another generation orphaned.

The numbers are numbing but one statistic provides compelling context. Right now there are 6 to 7

thousand funerals a day in Africa due to AIDS. It is not just the deceased who are affected by AIDS - it is everyone.

The Women:



African women are threatened by two simultaneous crises: famine and AIDS. HIV infection and AIDS are spreading dramatically and disproportionately among women. Women often have to care for the sick, thereby reducing the time they can devote to planting, harvesting and marketing crops. When a

woman's husband dies, she is often deprived of credit, distribution networks or land rights.

When a woman dies, the household will risk collapsing completely, leaving children to fend for themselves. The older ones, especially girls, will be taken out of school to work in the home or on the farm. These girls, deprived of education and opportunities, will be even less able to protect themselves against AIDS.

Women and girls face multiple layers of vulnerabilities - biological, cultural, social and economic. They will often engage in high-risk activities out of desperation - such as girls sleeping with older men in order to pay their school fees or sex workers not using condoms because they get paid five times as much for unprotected sex and they have extended families to feed. Infected women breastfeed their babies because they feel they don't have a choice, and are afraid of condemnation, or they can't afford to use breast milk substitutes safely.

Forty percent of all HIV/AIDS cases result from mother-to-child transmission.

Women need more than advice. They need resources, education, jobs - real options to live safely and productively in a world with AIDS.

The Children:



It is estimated that 95% of the more than 13 million children world-wide who have been orphaned by AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa. Children suffer profoundly as their parents fall sick or die. Their experience is often characterized by emotional distress, economic hardship, malnutrition and illness, withdrawal from school, fear and isolation,

loss of inheritance, increased abuse and increased risk of contracting the virus themselves. Studies show that children who lose their parents to AIDS are more likely to suffer from abuse than children orphaned by other causes. This is largely a result of the stigma and discrimination so often associated with AIDS.

Lack of resources means that in many African communities grandmothers raise as many as 8 to 12 grandchildren after both parents die of AIDS. 'Sibling families', child-headed households led by children as young as 10 and 12, are becoming commonplace.

Kenya, alone, has about 1.2 million children who have been orphaned by AIDS. The Kenyan government has abolished school fees for primary school children providing opportunities for orphaned children to attend school. Orphaned children who have little if anything to eat, who have no guarantee of shelter, no guarantee of health or nutritional care, no guarantee of a home or of love or of nurture - are no longer denied the right to attend school and the prospect of a future. This same decision should be adopted across Africa.

In Zimbabwe, in 2002, because of AIDS the country buried some 350 people a day, and by the year 2005 the government estimates there will be over 900,000 children under 15 struggling to survive without a mother.

As always, children and women carry the burden of abandonment, vulnerability, stigma, shame, poverty and desperation.

AIDS is more than a disease. AIDS is more than a public health crisis. AIDS is a global health crisis. AIDS is a global security threat.

What is needed:



- HIV prevention programs must be a critical component of any AIDS intervention program.
- Affordable generic drugs - plus equal access to the appropriate drugs and treatment.
- Appropriate service delivery in communities to provide treatment.
- Within communities - designation of land to be cultivated by all villagers to feed orphans and families of those suffering from debilitating illness, usually AIDS-related.
- Fostering initiatives (foster families) on commercial farms.
- Education in schools - demystifying what AIDS is - and encouraging discussion about safe sex everywhere from the classroom to the boardroom.
- Removal of school fees in every African country.
- Replace stigma with support, fear with hope, and shame and silence with solidarity. (Stigmatization and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS have affected prevention campaigns and undermined care and support efforts)
- Removal of Africa's foreign debt - immediately.
- Most of all - money. To fight poverty and AIDS.