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**Ecumenical Pre-Conference 2008:  
Faith in Action Now! – Day 3  
Closing Plenary: Leadership  
Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance  
August 2, 2008**

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**MATTHEW FROST:** Ladies and gentlemen, could I say that it is a great pleasure to be addressing you and moderating this final session on leadership? Do you know, I think there has been one theme that has been running through the whole of this conference? Every plenary, every workshop there has been a thread that has been running through. Sometimes that thread has been very visible, very glaringly obvious, and sometimes it has been buried and hidden. That thread is leadership. It is the issue of leadership. In order to see that HIV-free generation that we heard about earlier, in order to see local congregations be that place that we long local congregations to be, of hope, acceptance, love and transformation, we need courageous and Christ-centered leaders. There is no doubt about it. We need leaders who no longer conform to this pattern of this world, but are transformed by the renewing of their minds.

I was reflecting on leadership. I have been led by many people. I have had the benefit of knowing many leaders. And if I reflect on all of the leaders I have known, the ones that inspire me the most, the ones that I most want to follow all have two characteristics, two traits in all of them. The first one is an extraordinary and courageous humility. The second is they have an extraordinary and courageous resolve.

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Humility and resolve— now, those two things do not often go together, do they— humility, humble, and courageous passion and vision? But it is when they come together that I think we have extraordinary leaders. And I think it is these kinds of leaders that we need in the whole issue around HIV and AIDS. We need courageous humility because humility brings us to listen, it brings us to learn, to understand, to repent, as we saw yesterday, to acknowledge our weaknesses, our failings, our brokenness, our poverty of spirit, and our desperate reliance on Jesus Christ.

But we also need courageous resolve because this drives us to confront, rely on Christ and go out and confront issues, to speak the truth, to break the silence over HIV stigma and prejudice, over gender inequality, over gender-based violence, over male dominance. Fierce resolve, it leads us to address the underlying vulnerabilities that we heard about this morning, to speak out and to create safe spaces. It is when humility and resolve come together that I think we get integrity in our leadership, and that is when we have leaders who truly lead by example, and that is what I think we really, really need above all else.

Did we not experience that yesterday? Sophie spoke out with courage. She spoke out with extraordinary courageous

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resolve. But we also saw Bishop Mark act in an extraordinarily courageous, humble way in his act of repentance.

So, to help us explore the issue of leadership in more detail, let me introduce our three speakers. So, thank you so much to all three of you for agreeing to come. I am going to introduce them briefly now. First we have Paul Bekker closest to me. Paul is the Director of Health, Gender and Civil Society Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands, and he also has a role as sort of roving HIV and AIDS ambassador. Secondly, to his left, we have Monsignor Gustavo Rodriguez. Monsignor Gustavo is the President of the National Social Commission of the Catholic Church in Mexico, and he is also Auxiliary Bishop of Monterey.

On Monsignor Gustavo's left, Reverend Patricia Sawo. Patricia is [inaudible] HIV Ambassador. She is Regional Coordinator for East Africa for ANERELA, and she is also a pastor, a pastor of the Calvary Celebration Church in Kitale.

So, could we just welcome them all in one go, please? [Applause] So, I am going to hand over first to Paul Bekker. Paul, the floor is yours.

**H.E. PAUL BEKKER:** Thank you, Matthew. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, your excellencies, colleagues and friends. I have only been in this job for three years. In those three years I feel that over the past 20 years not enough

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attention has been given to the moral and to the ethical aspects of the global AIDS response. Also, in my own country, the Netherlands, the approach to HIV/AIDS has, one might say, sometimes been a bit too clinical, under-appreciating some of the real drivers for change. However, many individuals have focused on the moral aspects, and thanks to these people and the organizations that they have established, I have the impression that the faith-based participation at this International AIDS Conference is bigger than ever. And this pre-conference, actually, is an example of that. And I want to salute all the staff and the many, many volunteers who have made this possible. I especially want to thank the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and the Christian Health Committee.

I understand that you have been working very hard in the last days in exploring the challenges posed by the pandemic, reflecting on lessons learned and skills building to contribute to the process towards universal access to prevention, care, support and treatment. I wish had been able to participate myself as well, but I could not. But I already feel very privileged that I am here this afternoon, and I feel honored to share some of my thoughts with you, but I must say I feel a bit odd coming in here, bumping in here, speaking to you and not having too much of a clue on what you have already been discussing, so I might repeat what has been said previously.

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On the other hand, if what we just heard by the two young people, the statements they made, if that is pretty much a summary of these last three days, I must congratulate you because I thought that was a very impressive statement.

And as far as my little speech is concerned, luckily I was given a subject. The subject was the role of government and its relationship with faith-based organizations and the opportunities to make progress with reference to universal access. So, what I will do in the next couple of minutes is speak about first the importance of joining forces between both faith-based organizations and governmental institutions. I am convinced that more and better cooperation between FBOs and government will speed up the process of universal access. Cooperation between these two is quite a challenge. Prejudices at both sides often hamper communication and hamper cooperation. That is a missed opportunity. I will come to my third point that is talking about values, values that can be common ground for more fruitful cooperation, values that can form the building stones of the bridge between FBOs and governments.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is important, actually crucial that faith-based organizations and government institutions join forces more and better. The AIDS pandemic is so enormous, so overwhelming, involving so many people,

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families and communities, and it is so complex that only by joining forces will universal access come into closer reach.

Faith-based organizations and governmental institutions sometimes seem to operate in different worlds, having different mandates, even speaking a different language while the complementarity is crucial. Let me give an example.

Governments have a role in the procurement of medicines, of quality control, of care and treatment and of training of medical staff. FBOs are often heavily involved in providing home-based care and support in the local community. As a matter of fact, in my opinion, there is no one better than local church communities to actually reach people on the ground. So, therefore, FBOs are in an excellent position to advise government officials on training requirements, difficulties in adherence to ARV treatment, and the common complications regarding health services. So, we should make much better use of each other's knowledge, expertise and position in society.

But cooperation is not that easy, and that is my second point. As I said in my introduction, on both sides people have predisposed ideas about the other. Cooperation is often hampered by single issues, by general impressions and biases. For example, statements of the Vatican on single issues like condom use have often led to governments and people,

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international NGOs and others to turn their faces away from the church, which has created sheer ignorance by these governments and international NGOs of the enormous and impressive work done by FBOs with regard to the support of people living with HIV. Moreover, FBOs are often not invited to participate in policy maker or in implementation.

On the other hand, I am not sure if FBOs are more included to contact government agencies. Faith-based organizations often have cold feet to enter the governmental system. The threshold seems to be too high. They tend to experience allergic reactions of officials, thoughts and everything related to religion. They encounter jargon and procedures that are unclear and that shy them away.

Now, let me ask you, what does this mean for all those who find themselves caught in the middle, those who sincerely want to build that bridge between FBOs, secular governments, international NGOs, corporate life, et cetera? They are considered too conservative by the one and too progressive by the other. So, this disconnect between governments and FBOs is not only a missed opportunity, it also hurts and frustrates these good, willing people. And most of all people with and affected by HIV and AIDS deserve better.

So, ladies and gentlemen, what do we do about that? I will come to my third point. Cooperation is easier when there

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is common ground, shared values, and shared starting point. In this context, I would like to refer to the Irish Roman-Catholic theologian Reverend Enda McDonagh who, in 1994, wrote about the four kingdom values [misspelled?], which could form a basis for mutual understanding and closer cooperation between FBOs and governmental institutions. I am sure many of you know her. Actually, I am cited from "Theology in a Time of AIDS." It is a paper by Edna McDonagh from 1994, but it is still very much a clear indication of the way we all have to go. Now, these four values are truth, freedom, justice and peace. I have taken the liberty of using her four values and adding my own views to them. Let us together look at these values separately.

First of all, truth— according to Enda McDonough, it is necessary to be honest and open in these times of AIDS. Fears of contagion by family, friends and caregivers based in untruth can easily undermine social and personal responses. With her, I say, dare to face reality. Dare to speak about the difficult issues. It is necessary to break that silence and discuss openly sex, sexuality, talk about young, unmarried people who are having sex, discordant couples, men having sex with men, and drug use. Again, I can only repeat what has been said by the youngsters before. Through this openness, we will be able to deal effectively with HIV/AIDS.

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The second value is freedom. Enda McDonough states that in the face of the pandemic, the search for freedom from further infection through effective and humane preventive measures is an essential response. In my understanding, that means that people should be able to use condoms or use other preventive methods to free themselves from risking an HIV infection. In that same line, I am sure you have been speaking about the letter by 50 organizations to Pope Benedict. Benedict is to lift the ban on the use of preservatives.

The third value she spoke about was justice. Many of the problems revealed by the pandemic are problems of justice, personal and social. The spreading of HIV is closely linked to inequality. Examples are inequality with regard to access to healthcare, to commodities, to information, but also in terms of inequalities in societies. Gender inequality is also definitely one of these issues. The inability of many women to say no to unprotected sex or sexual violence is an inequality. Gender inequality leads to a further feminization of the AIDS epidemic. The AIDS response could and should be used as a tool to bring more justice in societies.

The last value Enda McDonough elaborates on is peace. Peace is central to the survival of the human race, she states. Peace involves healing, reconciliation and forgiveness, often the very fundamentals of the work of every [inaudible], of the

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work many of you do. According to Enda McDonough, the AIDS pandemic should stimulate people to have a better understanding of and promote the value of peace.

Ladies and gentleman, I slowly come to my conclusion. These kingdom values— truth, freedom, justice and peace— could form an excellent starting point for finding common group to further strengthen cooperation between faith-based organizations and governments.

When I read about Reverend McDonough's four values, it reminded me of the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians. Although St. Paul only explicitly mentions freedom in his list, I think these four values fit perfectly well in his fruits of the spirit, chapter five, as you know.

So, taking these four values as philosophical base, the willingness to build bridges and the necessity to do so, I would like to share with you the following suggestion. As I said in the beginning, in my humble opinion, a lot has been achieved already as far as the role of FBOs in the global AIDS response is concerned, including its participation in conferences as these. But, again in my opinion, FBOs need to be more involved in the decision making and the policy making process. Partnerships between FBOs and governments and other players ought to be strengthened.

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So, if you agree with me, I would say we go one step further because good intentions are fine, but are not good enough. We need a concrete follow up. Representatives of FBOs and governments need to further explore, define and agree on joint actions. It goes without saying that this should be done in due respect of each other's position and added value. And undoubtedly this conference this already a great stimulus to that, and I hope that all of you, the Christian communities gathered here, representatives of fellow governments, civil society organizations and UNAIDS, continue to join the discussion, to share your thoughts on how to strengthen each other and to realize universal access for all.

But on top of that, I believe we need a stronger voice, a voice that just about every constituency in AIDS response has, but not yet strongly enough the FBOs, a voice that is heard that puts FBOs on the policy making table. Perhaps the most effective way to achieve that is to create some sort of a think tank consisting of a small group of people that will lead the way. Perhaps I could call on the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance to take the lead in that, if they have not already done so. And I, as a representative of the Netherlands government, would be very proud if the Netherlands could be instrumental in hosting the first meeting of a think tank exploring the ways of building stronger bridges between FBOs

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and governmental agencies. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[Applause]

**MATTHEW FROST:** Paul, thank you very much. Thank you so much for your words. I think you have helped us in some many ways. I found it very encouraging to hear from you the affirmation of the role of the faith-based organizations and of local congregations and that we are a critical partner, but I also valued your highlighting and your openness of confronting the disconnect and the fact that we are not communicating as well as we could. But I think you have also laid down the challenge to us as leaders, particularly leaders within the church and within faith organizations, to engage in a conversation with you and not to shy away, not to fear the bureaucracy and whatever else you were telling us scares us away, but to engage. I think you gave us a fantastic invitation to come to the table, to build partnerships, and to engage in a dialogue. I think the idea of a think tank is terrific, so thank you very much.

Could we welcome now Monsignor Gustavo, please?

[Applause]

**MSGR. GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ:** [Spanish Spoken, English via Translator] Thank you very much and good afternoon. I am going to speak in Spanish because my English is not very good. I feel like I am with family because here we are all speaking the

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same language, the language of mutual respect, the language of dialogue, the language of gathering, the language of the search for justice and charity in favor of all of our brothers and sisters that are living with HIV.

The topic that they told me to talk about, which is really just leaders showing actions to avoid the pandemic and how religious leaders can help to lead actions against the pandemic. I want to say thank you, first of all, for inviting me here to share some of my reflections and some of my experiences about the important role of religious leaders or the role they could have to reduce the impact of the AIDS epidemic.

It has been over 25 years since the HIV epidemic started and it came to put in the world and in our hearts. Millions of people have died and others are living great struggles against HIV stigma and discrimination.

From the beginning of this epidemic, religious leaders have been a part of the response to the challenges that have been facing us from HIV in the best possible way. In some cases, we are leading directly, we are heading some actions. And in other cases we are trying to be together and motivating and trying to support the work of many men and women that, inspired by their faith, have heroic actions and quiet actions to face this epidemic. And sometimes even with fear of their

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own faith communities, they have been prophets calling us all, each and every one of us, to be involved actively in the world response to the challenges that are being presented to us by HIV. I want to recognize and thank so many who have given and who are still giving their lives to the service of Jesus Christ, represented by the people affected by this epidemic.

As religious leaders, we have a lot to give when we are sensitive to the problems that are hurting our people. Together with a lot of people that have great commitment to this struggle against AIDS, we have accomplished a few steps, but we know that it is neither enough or the best. With humility, I want to recognize positive actions that have meant hope, hope of life for those who are affected. I will say some of these actions. I will mention some of these actions facing the extended idea that some people defend passionately that AIDS was a punishment of God.

A lot of us have given a positive voice and a positive word based on the values of the Gospel, as could be the Catholic bishops of Zambia who said, we cannot marginalize people who are affected by AIDS. They cannot be condemned or thrown away, even if their disease is a result of their behavior. No one is without sin and no one has the right to throw the first stone at another. HIV requires our churches to develop and include communities that can be merciful to

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everyone and can follow the example of Christ, who taught through example, who forgave sinners and called them all to be his disciples, who shared with them the same roof and the same bread, who defended them of the fanaticism.

This is the mission that we have as Christians. The Catholic Church in Mexico, in its surge to try to include has the program that is hope of life, which reminds us that without feeling guilty and without buts we have to include people. It reminds us that to love is to include, to educate is to include, to pray is to include, and that including is having hope for life. This campaign has been fruit of a multidisciplinary work and inter-constitutional work that we have done. It is an effort that has been made by the effort, by organizations such as CRS and others, young university students and other professionals of different disciplines that have wanted to join to this initiative.

Facing AIDS, we have to talk about justice as something that is necessary in order to face HIV. The Catholic Church, together with other churches and organizations, has insisted on finding a solution to the problem of inequality when it comes to access to treatment for those who are living with HIV and other diseases that are also affecting some of the poorest people. Cardinal Javier [inaudible] who is President of the Council in Vatican City has said in a special session about

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HIV/AIDS and the United Nations, the situation of extreme poverty that a lot of people are facing is a very important factor in the rapid spread of AIDS. Certainly the promotion of social justice is a very important factor to fight against this disease in a way so that economical considerations are not going to be the only criteria in an uncontrolled globalized world.

As churches, we have a very important role in giving healthcare where it is needed with urgency. The state and the government are acting slow and have not done enough, so these services include treatment, support and development programs that mention the reality of the person that is being affected by HIV and his family. At the same time, with the work of management and lobbying, so that state institutions, as much as possible and as fast as possible, can take charge of giving integrated attention to the impact of HIV. It is always important to have pastors and spiritual guidance, because that is one of the most important jobs our churches have. We have to promote communities of faith that are informed in order to prevent new infections and to reduce the stigma and discrimination of the people that are being affected. We should remember the words of Pablo who said that if one member is suffering, another one is as well. So, that is why we all

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have to be involved actively in the response to the impact of HIV.

As religious leaders, we have to play a very important role in lobbying with governments and international institutions so that we can strengthen and add to the voices of organizations and the people of our churches that have been working from the base in the proposal of a day-to-day response to HIV. So, these people and these institutions can find in us strategic allies and especially an affectionate support that encourages them to continue with their work for those who are affected by HIV. That is why structures such as [inaudible] and the Conference of the Episcopal Mexican Church have included in their strategic planning that the church authorities have an important role of training of coordinator of projects to be implemented in churches or in parishes and to create networks.

For example, the Faith Network in Mexico or the Catholic Network in Latin America who have as objectives to exchange positive experiences and challenges and the joint structure of [inaudible], the response of Latin American churches towards AIDS. We have seen a response that is more comprehensive than just healthcare for those who are suffering from AIDS, and collaboration at every level of the church community and with several other stakeholders, including

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government and the civil society. This church could include as their stakeholders not only those who are recognized as pastoral agents, but also families, laymen, clergymen, bishops and also we could include government members, members of the civil society with their own community organizations, educational organization, other education centers, NGOs that are both national and international, the media and private enterprises. The actions that are being directed towards prevention support care and treatment.

Once again, the bishops of Latin America gathered in Brazil expressed in their conclusive documents, a few lines, a few statements that are very important to create a pastoral gathering in the region. And we consider it a great priority to encourage a pastoral gathering with people who are living with HIV in the broad context and in their specific pastoral meanings that promote comprehensive togetherness, that is provides mercy and protects the rights of the people that are infected. Something that can implement the information that promotes education and prevention using ethical criteria, especially amongst the newer generations so that they can wake up, so that their conscience can awaken and we can start containing this pandemic.

In this conference, we are asking governments to give free and universal access to medicines against AIDS and the

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effective and opportune dosage. It is important that in all of our opportunities we use them for the service to other people. We can always do more if these possibilities are put together with that of other people and other institutions in a way that we can answer from different points of view and from different ideas to the impact of HIV in a very evangelical way. So, this is why we have to put aside our differences and find that which can put us together and that which is our calling to work together for Jesus and through Jesus, restoring his face which is present in all of our brothers and sisters that have been affected by HIV, and also working together against all the fractures that exist in our world and that hurt the daily life and that go against people living their life fully.

So, I want to remind and talk about the words talked about by Monsignor Mijilo [misspelled?] from [inaudible] International, the representative for AIDS to Mexican bishops that were gathered in the Conference of the Episcopal Commission in Mexico only a few months ago. The HIV crisis around the world has called all of us, as church leaders, to go ahead with our own transformation, to do our own conversions so that we can act from this commission in favor of those who have been affected by HIV/AIDS according to the church's mission, which calls the people of God. We are certain that we have a lot of work to do, but we also know that the Lord has wanted

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all of us believers to work together, to live together, and to have everything in common, including challenges such as AIDS.

I want to finish up with this. This morning we have announced to the media a new document from the bishops of Mexico, our Faith in Action, so that our brothers and sisters living with AIDS have a life of dignity. This document is an orientation by us bishops of the Episcopal Commission about the answers and the responses that we have to have towards the challenges of HIV. And this document was asked by the Plenary of Bishops in the month of April, and now we are keeping our promise in our campaign of Hope of Life, which started four years ago.

Four years ago, Pope John Paul II, may he rest in peace, asked us to have a fundraising for the people Africa with HIV, so we decided to do it here in Mexico, but we also decided to look at ourselves, to look at our brothers and sisters living with HIV or that are sick with AIDS in our own country. And that is how we started this campaign to try to put together all of the forces and all of the strengths of our pastoral church and to work together in favor of our brothers and sisters. This is work that has to be done by all of us. In this document, in this guidance that we did, we are trying to tell all the Catholic community that we have to assume an attitude of a Good Samaritan. We cannot just look away. We

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have to show solidarity for our brothers and sisters and work with brothers and sister of other churches, with all governments and institutions that are taking care of all of these brothers and sisters. This is a work that pertains to us all. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**MATTHEW FROST:** Thank you very much, Monsignor Gustavo. You have shared with us I think the enormous challenge and responsibility of those of us in leadership positions in the church. There are so many things that we can potentially do to help tackle the HIV pandemic. You talked about the need to promote and inclusive, loving, accessible community at all levels. You talked about the need to promote social justice. You talked about the need to advocate and challenge and hold governments to account. You talked about the need to promote an integrated response at a grassroots level in many, many areas. You have also talked about the need for partnership, which again reinforces what Paul was sharing with us, partnerships that go beyond the faith community. I loved your point where you talked about- I think you said that the HIV/AIDS crisis has called us, as church leaders, to be transformed, to be converted. I think that is such an important point that it starts with us being converted, us being transformed. And out of that place, then we can engage indeed. So, thank you very much.

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Finally, I would like to ask Patricia to come up and address us. Patricia? [Applause]

**REV. PATRICIA SAWO:** Thank you very much, Matthew. I am so humbled to stand before you, even to talk on the theme of leadership. In our midst is a man of God whom I would not wish- I am so humbled that he is in our presence this day, even as I do this presentation. This is none other than Dr. Bishop Mark, my bishop. [Applause] In one of his conferences teaching us on leadership, he gave a very simple definition of what leadership is. He said leadership is influence. I am humbled because this is one of the top church leaders who accepted and allowed his church to take the role of bottom up leadership. When I tested HIV-positive, we struggled as a local church in many ways, but finally he gave room for me to be a leader who could speak with them, even in the bishops meetings, in the meetings where the bishops are the ones who are preaching, the national meetings. They allowed me to do nothing but to share my HIV status and the struggles I was going through. That was in a time where it was still difficult for the Kenyan church to even accept that church leaders are living with HIV. Thank you very much.

I am sure and I am aware that there are many leaders in this meeting that have made this possible. MAP International, and Pete [Inaudible] is here, has been very crucial in helping

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the [inaudible] even to come up with church policy on HIV and AIDS. And I am so grateful for all of you in this room who have empowered me to be the kind of leader I am today, not forgetting there are other members who are here who have empowered me to even go back to the church and empower the church. [Inaudible] that held me in high esteem and even made me their HIV and AIDS ambassador. I am so grateful for the work that is going on, even as HIV makes the church the church and makes us better leaders.

My presentation today for us is going to be simple. Most of the time I share my story and many of us who are here who have heard me share my story could be expecting another story. Today I am not going to share another story, because I am talking about what type of relationship we should have as religious leaders with people living with HIV and AIDS. I am going to share it in a very simple way, because I am just going to talk about some of the things that we done, but so much I want to begin from what we have been doing this week.

And I want to begin by saying that as people of faith and members of the church, we need to think about what we say and what we hear other people of faith saying that stigmatizes HIV and AIDS and people living with HIV. It is very important for us to think of what we hear other people say and what we say that stigmatizes HIV and AIDS. One of our ANERELA members,

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[Inaudible], passionately holds this saying: It is only by confronting stigma and discrimination that the fight against HIV and AIDS will be won. I am one of those church leaders who was passionately stigmatized, and I know that the stigmatizer sometimes does not know when they are stigmatizing. I am one of those church leaders who suffered great self stigma and almost died of self stigma, and I know that stigma kills. Therefore, unless we confront it, we cannot be able to win the battle.

The theme of this conference is Faith in Action Now. In Romans 10:17 it says this: So then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. The good news I have for us today is that the word of God, which we love— I believe all of us in this room do because we are people are faith— is full of stories and we have been here listening to stories and facts. Since we have been here, we have heard lots of stories. Some have been good news and some have been sad. The question I have for us is this— what do you do with what you hear? It is true that faith comes by hearing, but what do you do with what you hear? That is where the problem is.

Some of us have heard things that stigmatize and we have allowed them to depress us and died of AIDS. In Nehemiah Chapter 1, Verse 4 it talks of what Nehemiah had heard. This is what it says. So, it came to pass when I heard of those

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words that I sat down and wept and mourned certain days and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven. I fasted and prayed and mourned for four years, struggling to come out of societal stigma and self stigma. The good news is that I did not remain there and Nehemiah did not remain there.

Many times we will want to bring stories in HIV and AIDS, and I want to encourage us that the stories in the bible are there to encourage us, but most of the time we have chosen the wrong stories. I tell people that I refuse to relate leprosy with HIV because it stigmatizes. [Applause] It stigmatizes and I do not want to be part of stigma because I was stigmatized. Why choose a portion of the bible which is talking about a disease which was considered unclean? There are many stories in the bible. And now we have more stories. They are stories of Patricia, they are stories of Christo Greyling, who gave us powerful stories. They are stories that you can use to relate to HIV and help us overcome HIV. But this is the thing- Nehemiah, after hearing the story, did something. The story does not end with him sitting, weeping and wondering, but the story ends with him doing a wonderful job, no longer a cup bearer, but a great leader in Jerusalem.

As faith leaders and a person of faith, what do you do with what you hear? I have been here three days hearing and hearing and my greatest question that I will repeat over and

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over is what do you do with what you here. Isaiah 52, Verse 7—  
how beautiful upon the mountains at the feet of him that bring  
good news, that publishes peace, that brings salvation that  
says unto Zion thy God reigns.

There is a lot of good news about HIV and AIDS, and the  
good news I have this evening is that HIV has made me a better  
pastor, committed to doing what Jesus Christ would do. And I  
want to pause a minute. I am a mother and a mother of 10  
children, 5 are my own biological children and they are between  
ages 22 and 8. My firstborn, who is 22 years old, brought in  
Laura [misspelled?] into our house. Laura's parents died in  
1999 when I was also just struggling with my HIV status. That  
was it. She was never picked up from school and relatives  
never followed to find out what happened. She has been our  
child. Laura is not 20 years old. Many people asked me, you  
have lost your job, you people are doing nothing and you are  
picking up so many children. What are you going to do with  
these children? As I speak with you today, Laura is in  
university doing her second year while my daughter is doing her  
third year. God has been gracious.

But why have I brought Laura into this presentation?  
In yesterday's presentation there was a presenter who did not  
appear up here, and her name was Laura. She is 20 years old.  
I heard this story. She spoke behind the scenes. She is 20

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years old and as she spoke, my heart was torn. I wanted to cry because here was a girl speaking behind the scenes. She is suffering from self or societal stigma, either of those. We talk so passionately about HIV and AIDS as a disease that is only connected to sex, yet we have children 20 years and above. They are abstaining. They have never had sex. Their parents have not been there to tell them how they got HIV. I have been there to tell my children, sorry. I do not know how I got HIV, but I have been there for my children. Laura is a leader. I want to call upon us to say she cannot be a leader behind the scenes. She cannot continue sitting behind the scenes.

[Applause]

And you and I can commit ourselves to act now. I want us to take a minute. I want you to just stand up on your feet and act with faith. This is how we are going to act. This is how I feel it within me. You are going to stand. Laura is not here. Many of them— there are so many that are silent and not even speaking behind the scenes, but they are suffering and they wish they could tell somebody. I just want you to stand and hug those people who are silent or those who are speaking behind the scenes, hug them and as you hug them, commit yourself that by the time we are coming to the next AIDS conference you will have reached a number of people who are behind the scenes who are silent and you will help them

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overcome self stigma or societal stigma and be leaders. If I was not helped, I would not be here today. I want us to take faith and action of faith. I do not know how many numbers you want to commit yourself to, but when I got the good news in ANERELA I committed myself to [inaudible]. In a way, you are going to see some of the things I have done in pictures. I want you to take an action of faith and stand up on your feet. As you hug that person, as you help me hug Laura and many others who are silent outside there, commit yourself to a number. If you want to say by the time I am coming to the next conference, I will have touched 10 lives, pulled them and helped them overcome self and societal stigma. We are saying faith is action and now. By faith, commit yourself to a number and hug them. I am not going to say hug another person- hug them as you stand for one minute and commit yourself to a number. You may be seated.

Faith in action now and not tomorrow- we have to begin here. Faith is action now and it is what is going to help us defeat HIV and AIDS. Unless we commit ourselves, unless we act, we are not going to be able to overcome HIV and AIDS. ANERELA+ has a vision and an objective which I hold with high esteem as my good news, the good news which has made me a better leader. Tiafante [misspelled?] has a vision and one objective. I am just talking about ANERELA's vision and its

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one objective. Tiafante's vision and its one objective which are good news to me. The good news is that ANERELA has a vision to see an Africa with no more AIDS death. Not just Africa, but a world with no more AIDS death and no more new infections. And the objective, which is good news to me, is that ANERELA empowers a religious leader to be a role model, and agent of change in its congregation, community and the nation at large. I have upheld that vision. They have empowered me and I have stimulated congregational responses, and I have not been the same. And Tiafante has another one which is good news to me. Tiafante has a vision of mobilizing 100,000 churches to transform 50 million lives within the next 10 years. Is that not good news, worthy to rejoice of?

I want to share the effects of this good news that I am talking about on one faith leader, just one, Patricia, whose attitude changed and overcame societal and self stigmat. It has power and it triplicates itself. Once more I want to repeat that faith is action, now.

Very quickly I want to share some pictures. That is a picture of a woman who was dying of AIDS in one of our Deliverance Church congregations. She was literally dying of AIDS with nobody to help her get antiretrovirals. I pushed for her and she got the antiretroviral drugs. Her children have a

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smile because they have their mother. Their mother who was dead and has now risen— the Lazarus effect in ARVs.

Just right in the middle is Churchill, a young boy who was thrown at the district hospital and left to die of AIDS. Five years old and he was three kilos. As he is now right in the middle, he is 18 kilos and he is living and very happy and fine at the Discover to Recover Center, which we ran as a congregation.

Right there is a small boy, Benjamin. Benjamin's mother poisoned the father and left. She left him with that old grandmother. When we picked Benjamin, he had wounds all over his body, simply because the old woman cannot wash him, cannot feed him. Benjamin is now better than the picture that you see there. That old woman is a woman whose children have all died because of AIDS. She has nobody to take care of her. At least she can come and have a meal at the Discover to Recover Center, our congregational response.

Right there is me and the children at Discover to Recover and some of the vulnerable women that we support. With the support of Tiafante's staff, just the staff— we are not going to wait for Bill Gates— we have been able to raise money that we used to build those classes with. That day we were opening the classes for the children to have somewhere to have

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quality education, not just some education. In Kenya, there is free education, but with 100 children in a class.

That is another miracle, a child of a vulnerable woman who could not be clothes having a sweater to put on. The Reverend Winney [misspelled?] is dressing her with the sweater from one of the women in the UK, widows just making sweaters to give out to give people warmth in other parts of the world.

I am finishing. Our duty is to revisit our language, doctrines, and public messages. What do you preach? What are some of the languages that you stigmatize with? Explain the difference between what is lawful and what is safe. I have been in a lawful marriage for the last 24 years, but I am living with HIV with a husband who is not living with HIV. Differentiate what is lawful and what is safe and make a clear distinction and give accurate information. Differentiate between refusal and failure to change behavior. We keep on saying that people have refused. In the 26 years HIV is here, they have refused. Differentiate— are they refusing or are they failing? Differentiate individual and societal morality. Not everybody has HIV because they are immoral. HIV is not just a moral issue. Differentiate between what is risky and unsafe behavior and risky and unsafe environments.

We need to determine the size and nature of our problems and use the existing tools and approaches to overcome

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stigma. ANERELA is a model I would wish to refer you to. Develop and expand congregational responses. Yes, the churches are doing a lot of work, but we need to expand our responses with non-judgmental, caring and compassionate attitudes. We need to be role models and create linkages for us to be able to be effective leaders. We need to overcome negative self fear and self stigma and preach restoring hope. And I want to welcome you to become part of an advocacy team that can make the world a better place.

I want to call us to action. As I call us to action, there are three very important things that I want us to do this evening, even as we will be finalizing. As people of faith, we need to enhance peace and reconciliation. The church has been stigmatized and the church has stigmatized. We need to reconcile that and we need to repent. It is high time we said sorry we stigmatized without knowing, and it is high time people living with HIV also come to us and stop and have peace and reconciliation and say, wait a minute. I might have been stigmatized, but how has this made me a worse person? Can this make me a better person? We need to reconcile ourselves. We need to recognize the influence that we have and deal with the issues that I have highlighted. And we need to accept human vulnerability. We are all vulnerable religiously, socially, politically and economically. Unless as a church we embrace

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these three issues passionately and act, we will not be able to overcome HIV and AIDS. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**MATTHEW FROST:** Patricia, thank you. I think your call for us to act— we have been privileged to hear so many stories. Will they just be stories, or will they become of our own stories as well as we act? Your reminder for each of us to remember the names, to make it personal, to— I think in the language of Bishop Mark yesterday— practice an ethic of proximity— will we do that as leaders?

I would like to spend a little time in discussion, as has become the norm in these plenaries. But before you do this, in the next 5 to 10 minutes, let us be very clear that we are all leaders. The messages we have heard today are for every single one of us. I would like to maybe just give us a little bit of extra emphasis for us to decide what we are going to do. What one thing are we going to act on? It might be what Patricia has just shared, but in addition to that, what one thing would we do? Would you just look on your table and each of you find a pen and a bit of paper? I do not mind how big or small it is, if it has something else written on it. It does not matter what it is, but if each of you would find one pen and one bit of paper— I hope you have all found one— would you spend two minutes in contemplation and reflect what it is that you are going to do? How are you going to act now? In

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two minutes, we will go into discussion. I will tell you when the two minutes are up. If you could, just you and God reflect for two minutes please.

Okay, hopefully you have written something down. Could you put it away someplace safe? Please do not lose what you have written down. We are running a bit late. What I would like to propose is that just for a few minutes, could you reflect on what one question you would like to ask the panel? We will try and take a few of those questions and then respond. So, three or four minutes maximum. If there is one question that you would like to ask, please get it out there. Again, if you have any others, write them on the cards and put them on the box on the outside so we do not lose your questions. So, for a few minutes, please discuss. Thank you.

All right, hopefully we have roving microphones. Are there any questions for our panel? We can take only four or five, I am afraid. We will just have to do one round. There is a question over there. Could the gentleman get the microphone, please? And I hope we are translating the questions, please. Could we have some quiet please?

**MALE SPEAKER:** Patricia pointed us to the fact that as religious leaders we need to revisit our religious language, our doctrines, and our public messages. The question we have at our table is how do we overcome one of the great tendencies

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that occur even in this group? So often, even as we condemn stigma, our theological language stigmatizes those who are HIV-positive. When we, as Christians, talk about our involvement with fighting diabetes or Parkinson's disease or cancer, we never say we are all sinners. But when we address HIV and AIDS, we tend to justify our involvement by using that language of sin. [Applause] How do we get our Christians, including myself, to begin to remember that Jesus approached people, the crowds to heal, without stigmatizing those he reached out to? This is a fundamental theological language that we have to deal with, because it shows what is really in our mind and heart when we stigmatize and add to the sins of stigmatization and discrimination by our theological language. So, Patricia, if you can help us overcome that, please? You pointed us in that direction. Thank you.

**MATTHEW FROST:** Great, thank you very much.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I wanted to thank all of the speakers for what they have shared with us today. Particularly, I wanted to pick up what Ambassador Bekker said about the importance of having a think tank and a dialogue between faith communities and government. Just to say thank you for that offer. I am from UNAIDS, but we have already begun a dialogue with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and faith groups. Earlier this year we did have a meeting of a kind of think

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tank, and we have already begun to work on a strategy for engagement. I think that is really exciting to see from governments as well. I would just like to thank you for that and say that we can carry on that collaboration between the three partners.

**MATTHEW FROST:** Great, thank you. A question over there?

**CAESAR:** Good afternoon, my name is Caesar. Twenty years ago, I [inaudible]. I really appreciate and I would like to thank everyone, especially Monsignor Gustavo Rodriguez, who has always been a very special person who has already supported us, especially me. I would like to thank him. I am here thanks to him because I come from a very humble association. It does not belong to [Spanish language]. It is from Monterey and even because of this, he did a great favor to me to help me to come to this conference. He has gone to have meals with me. He has asked me to eat with him. He is a very humble person and I say this everywhere. Thank you very much, Father.

[Applause]

**MATTHEW FROST:** Okay, other questions? Are there really no questions? Goodness me. Well, if I could ask each of our speakers to just come up and reflect on either what they have heard or any closing comments they would like to share, we will take it from Patricia first, please.

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REV. PATRICIA SAWO: The how of changing our messages and doctrines, which came from him— I want to say that as much as we talk about behavior change, behavior change is difficult, but attitude change is difficult as well. The reason why our message is stigmatized is the attitude that we have when we are developing or maybe bringing forth these messages. ANERELA+ has retreats which have really helped us as religious leaders to change our attitudes towards the way in which we message or the way in which we think about HIV, and that is what has helped most of us overcome self stigma and even societal stigma. There are organizations which have taken up that model and they have used it.

Christo Greyling was sharing with us here on the channels of hope which World Vision uses to sensitize church leaders. And in those workshops, the first day, depending on how they have been programmed, we get resistance and very negative attitudes from church leaders. But by day three when we are doing living with HIV and AIDS, the church leaders repent. Most of the church leaders who have gone through these workshops have not remained the same. He shared with us about one of the pastors and how he changed his negative messages and thought that he was the one who needed to repent, instead of people living with HIV needing to repent. And I know that MAP International has adapted that and used it to promote channels

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of hope in theological colleges. I know that that is the very, very tool that I have used in many workshops that I have had with church leads to let us change our attitudes and begin having the right attitude to preach the right message.

You know, many times we think it is our messages that change people. Our messages do not change people. Nobody preaches for the prodigal son, nobody. He preached to himself. I will go back to my father's house, for in my father's house even servants are treated better and they do not feed on food for pigs. Many times we think that we are the ones who are fix people. We need to rise about that as church leaders. We cannot fix people. Many people preach to themselves and they bring themselves to the church. It is not us bringing them. It is about attitude change. Thank you. [Applause]

**MSGR. GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ:** I again want to express my happiness to be with you at the end of this pre-conference. How much happiness someone could express— how much satisfaction for what God had inspired to our church and to our churches to do in favor in all of our brothers who live with HIV and AIDS, in favor of all our brothers who are ill because of AIDS. How much could we talk and say about percentages, about attention and solidarity? Nevertheless, our word has to be before anything a word of surrender. I preach to ask God for so many brothers and sisters who had not had such justice, who had not

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had such charity. I hope this pre-conference has a result in all of us and we can become promoters of conversion in our own religious communities to get closer to Christ in our brothers who have suffered illness and discrimination. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**H.E. PAUL BEKKER:** Yes, thank you. Although I am not in the position at all to comment on the question of the gentleman over there, I am just a simple AIDS ambassador among theologians, ministers and bishops here, although if it was not for celibacy, I might have become a priest. [Laughter] That is not a joke, it is serious. Well, I have a witness here, my good friend who knows from a private conversation that that is the truth.

Anyway, I just want to make one comment on that. I think you gave the answer yourself already. It is all about following Jesus Christ. One book that made a big impression on me was Maria Cimperman's, *When God's People Have AIDS*. That was very impressive. She kind of wrote about the dilemma, but her very clear conclusion was that you have to help your fellow citizen, be they Christian or not. That is an obligation we all have as Christians. But I think you already mentioned it yourself. Thank you Sally for responding. It will be a big pleasure for us to be involved. What I really want to stress is the fact, of course, that the partnership of government and

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FBOs should be a natural partnership. What I also tried to convey is that I think it relates to empowerment. If you look at all the constituencies that are part of the policy making on HIV/AIDS, be it women, be it the gay community, be it LGBT, they are all organized and have a place at the table. What I see and I really want to comment about is [inaudible]. I see him often. He is a stern supporter and involved in the policy making on universal access, for instance, but I have the feeling that the Christian community, the religious community—perhaps I should make that a bigger picture—should have a stronger voice and be more organized. So you have these rights and you should ask for a position at the table. I really hope we can work on that. We would like to be involved in that. Thank you. [Applause]

**MATTHEW FROST:** Thank you very much to the three of you. I just want to close with a couple of reflections and then I am going to ask Patricia to come and just pray for us all. Just a couple of thoughts— I just want to remind us it was Sophie's challenge yesterday and she said this, religious leaders hold the key to doing away with stigma and prejudice. Patricia said the same again. Her challenge was this— from what we have heard, from all the stories we have heard, what will we now do, and how will we inspire other leaders to also act on what they hear? As it says, faith in action now.

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Patricia, would you come up and pray for us? Thank you.

**REV. PATRICIA SAWO:** I want to ask us to stand as we pray. Our loving Father in the mighty name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we humble ourselves before you this day as people of faith. Lord, we recognize that we have been against you in many ways. We have not treated your people well and we, as a people, have not represented you well in the ways in which we could have represented you in HIV and AIDS. Now on this day, we stand before the humbly, graciously asking for your forgiveness. Lord, we want to pray that you forgive us for stigmatizing and even for being stigmatized as a church because we have shown closed thinking that in accepting and embracing HIV and AIDS we are shaming you. Jesus, we know that you were wounded and that you took our shame on the cross and that you are not ashamed of any of us, just as we are you accepted us. And we just want to stand, even as we bleed for forgiveness, we know that as the church we have the power to bring peace and reconciliation. For the last 26 years, Lord, there has been lots of hurting in the HIV and AIDS world. We want to pray that, Lord, you forgive us and heal us and make us your instruments of peace. We want to pray, Lord, that where we have pointed fingers at people living with HIV you may forgive us. You are the same today and forever and you do not change,

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Lord. You pointed out to Moses that he abused your people, the people of Israel. He only mentioned what you kept on mentioned. Lord, I want to pray that you open the eyes of our hearts that we may be able to have the right words and not misuse your word even as we talk to your people. We want to pray for attitude change, Lord. Help us change our attitudes that as we leave this place, we are leaving this place a better people knowing the potential that we have as a church, even in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Lord, we want to pray that as we leave this place each and every one of us is passionately thinking of reducing stigma right from our families, for if our families are healthy, Lord, the churches are healthy. Help us to talk about HIV and AIDS from within our houses. Help us to talk about sex and sexuality in our houses, Lord, even as we extend it to the church congregations. We humble before you Lord. Help us, Lord, to understand that we are weak, that we are vulnerable. Apostle Paul says that the things I want to do, I do not do. And the things I do not want to do are the things I do. But, Lord, finally he says, I can do all things through Christ who enables me. How we pray, Lord, that as church leaders you are helping us identify with people's vulnerability. We are beginning with ourselves, throwing our hands up and saying, Lord, we are vulnerable. Help us to

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uphold vulnerability and help people in their weaknesses, for in our weaknesses you make us strong.

As we end this plenary, Lord, we want to pray that you help us. Whatever we wrote on the papers that we wrote, whatever numbers we came up with when we were hugging those who are hiding, those who are in silence, those who are speaking behind the scenes. Lord, we want to pray that you help us to bring that into accomplishment. We thank you for all of us represented here and all countries represented here, Lord. We want to pray that you cause us to make a difference in all the places we came from. Lord, above all things, we want to commit people living with HIV into thy able hands, and we want to pray, Lord, that you help people living with HIV seek the peace in living with HIV and that, Lord, they may be able to forgive where they were stigmatized, for in forgiveness there is healing. We love you, Lord. We thank you for having brought us in this place, and we pray that, Lord, cause ignites your light in us that we may be salt and light to the world, in Jesus' name.

**MATTHEW FROST:** If we could just thank our panel please, thank you very much. [Applause]

[END RECORDING]

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