

## **Religion and New Leadership: The Challenge to Deliver XVI International AIDS Conference August 14, 2006**

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**JAMES CAIRNS:** Good morning and welcome to this session on Religion and New Leadership, the Challenge to Deliver. My name is James Cairns. I'm with the World Conference of Religions for Peace, and together with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, it is our great pleasure to have facilitated and brought this session to the International AIDS Conference in Toronto.

This session will be a conversation about how religious communities have been working to fulfill commitments that they made to one another and to the world at the Bangkok AIDS Conference two years ago and in many other fora over the last decade and more.

It is my great pleasure to put this session in the able hands of our moderator for this morning, Ms. Carol Gore, who is an editorial columnist of the *Toronto Star* newspaper here in our host city. Carol, it's a great pleasure to have you with us and I will let her introduce the panel and guide us through this conversation.

Let me make one announcement before we do that. Our volunteers in the blue vests have blue index cards. If you have questions that you want to pose to the panel, please indicate by a hand. They can give those to you during the session. About 45 or 50 minutes into the session we'll collect those and sort through them and pass them through the

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moderator for some responses and follow-ups. So just as you're listening, if you want to write a question down, just signal and the volunteers will be able to do that. Carol it's all yours, thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Let me echo James' words of welcome and also let me do that as a Canadian and a resident of Toronto. I hope you find the whole conference very fulfilling, and I hope you enjoy our session.

The people you see on this panel represent four different continents. We have speakers from the Muslim community, the Hindu community, and the Buddhist community as well as four denominations of the Christian Church.

The aim of this session is to take the theme of the conference, "Time to Deliver," very seriously and examine how well religious communities have done in keeping the commitments they made two years ago in Bangkok. We'll look at what's worked, what hasn't, where the obstacles are and what it would take to overcome them.

Before I introduce our speakers, let me explain what will happen. First, our panelists will work their way through the four key Bangkok commitments. As they do that, please jot down any questions you have. Your questions will be the basis for the second half of our discussion.

Now, with apologies for my clumsy North American tongue, let me introduce our panelists. First, and I'll ask

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the panelists to stand as I'm introducing them, we have Bishop Mark Hanson. He is presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and President of the Lutheran World Federation, U.S.A.

Bishop Hanson was elected Bishop of the St. Paul area Senate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1995 and had been re-elected to a second term as Synodical Bishop prior to his election as Presiding Bishop of the ECLA in 2001.

While serving the St. Paul area Senate, Hanson was President of the Minnesota Council of Churches from 1998 to 2000 and was Vice-Chair of the ECLA Conference of Bishops. In 2003, Hanson was elected President of the Lutheran World Federation, a role which he serves concurrently with his role as ECLA Presiding Bishop.

He serves on the Executive Council on the Executive Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Hanson is author of, "Faithful, Yet Changing the Church in Challenging Times," published in 2002.

Our second speaker is Professor Farid Esack of Harvard University and founder of Positive Muslims of South Africa. A South African Muslim theologian, Esack has studied in Pakistan, the U.K., and Germany. He has written "Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism," "On Being a Muslim," and "An Introduction to the Qur'an."

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His most current work is "Islam [inaudible], Reflections Based on Compassion, Responsibility and Justice." Professor Esack served as a Commissioner for Gender Equality in the South African government and has taught at various international universities including Hamburg, the College of William and Mary, and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Currently, he is Acting Director of Positive Muslims, a South African Islam Muslim's organization that supports people living with AIDS and does research around the theme of Islam, Muslims and AIDS. He is the Bloomberg professor at Harvard University.

Our third speaker is Ms. Vishnu Dimeray [misspelled?]. Vishnu is from Nepal. She has been working in HIV AIDS for 11 years. She is a member of the South Asian Interfaith Council.

Our fourth speaker is Reverend Johannese P. Heath, Secretary General of African Network of Religious Leaders Living With or Positively Affected by HIV and AIDS in South Africa. Reverend Heath was born in Namibia. At 27 he trained for Anglican Priesthood and was ordained priest in 1995.

After testing HIV positive in 2000, he started to be increasingly directed towards HIV and AIDS related ministry and in November of 2002 he co-founded Anerela. As General Secretary, his ministry is directed more specifically toward

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stigma and discrimination eradication within faith communities and assisting other religious leaders living with AIDS to live openly and positively as agents of change and heralds of hope in their congregations, communities and countries.

Our fifth speaker is Pramaha Buonchaui Doojai, Director of Chai Mei Buddhist College in Thailand. He has been a leader in the monks' response to HIV and AIDS in Thailand and Southeast Asia. He carries the Interfaith Network on AIDS in Thailand and the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS. He holds a PhD in Buddhist studies.

And finally, I would like to introduce Ms. Dulce Alejo Espinal. Dulce is a community educator from the Dominican Republic, working with people living with HIV and AIDS. She is responsible for the HIV and AIDS ministries in the Baptist Independent Evangelical Mission and directs the Hope Child project.

She is a founding member of solidarity Alliance and is a representative of the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS.

And now we will go right into the four commitments from Bangkok. The first was to directly involve people living with or directly affected by HIV in the response, with particular attention to the greater burden carried by women and girls.

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And Dulce, we would ask you to begin. Can you give us some examples of how religious communities are doing that in the Caribbean? Dulce speaks only Spanish so we're arranging a little bit of last-minute interpretation here.

**INTERPRETER:** There was just a problem with the apparatus. Just broke down the last one.

**CAROL GORE:** Sorry.

**INTERPRETER:** She we will need another receiver whenever there is a minute.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** Good morning to everyone.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** It's a great pleasure for me to share our experience and my experience with you today.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** Now I'm going to talk a little bit about my involvement with people living with HIV AIDS in my country.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And how they have been welcome within the churches.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And also how some of the groups have tried to slow down the coming together.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

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**INTERPRETER:** If you think of the extra burden that women and young girl's carry because of living with HIV AIDS.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** We have set up small ministries within the church.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And this is co-managed by members of the church and members who are living with HIV AIDS.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And then a large group has welcomed us. They have helped us in our tasks. They have provided a great campaign of awareness raising. We have included in this pastors and leaders and various members in order to carry out our path with people living with HIV AIDS.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** Right now we have ten women who are living with HIV AIDS. They are in great need. We are doing a task of accompaniment, of help, of support.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** They require emotional support. As much as we can we provide financial support.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** We have self-supporting groups within the churches.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

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**INTERPRETER:** Christian people living with HIV-

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** that together with the members of the church-

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And we are carrying out a type of care, you could call it home care, especially for those girls who are orphans who are living with their grandparents.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And then also outside of the church, we also have other people participating, helping us, supporting us in carrying out these activities in sharing our experience in the daily work that we do, the home visits and things like this.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And also we have become sort of the mums, the mothers for these girls since the grandparents, in many cases, are quite elderly and they're not able to carry out all their responsibilities and care and everything else that is required.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** We have a large number of churches who have taken on this challenge who are doing things.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

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**INTERPRETER:** And there is another group, not so numerous, but there's another group that are having difficulties accepting this situation. Their involvement is tenuous, it's weaker. And they do help, they do participate but they are basically taken by the stigmas of this illness.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** But clearly these are a minority.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much Dulce. As Dulce mentioned, one of the constraints is finances. Jape perhaps you could tell us about some other obstacles the churches have encountered in trying to fulfill this commitment.

**JAPE HEATH:** I think one of the major difficulties which churches have in terms of directly involving people with HIV in programs related to HIV and AIDS is that churches haven't fully come to terms with the reality that people living with HIV and AID aren't out there. They're also in here.

And that's one of the major obstacles which are going to have to be overcome if we're going to really, as I say, move well beyond involving people living with HIV but rather move towards the full integration of people living with HIV and AIDS into programs related to HIV and AIDS.

In September of 2006, 2004 sorry, the World Council of Churches very proactively decided to work with Anerela,

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with GNP Press and with ICW in terms of developing workplace policies around HIV and AIDS.

And it was very important, that it was specifically people living with HIV who were involved in trying to draft those policies and see how they could basically implement it in terms of churches around the world.

So there are some steps, some very positive steps being taken, but the majority of churches are still sitting in a position that we are serving people out there living with HIV, not people within our communities.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. And Bishop Hanson, perhaps you could talk about some of the lessons that religious communities have learned as they try to fill this commitment.

**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** Well I think we have to do a searching inventory of our own behavior, attitudes and actions that have been complicit in the marginalization and stigmatization of people living with HIV and AIDS rather than the full inclusion of people who are living with HIV and AIDS.

It's interesting that I think most of our sacred texts compel us to stand with those who are suffering, to have mercy rather than marginalize, to empower rather than stigmatize.

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And yet, somehow those prevailing themes of most of our sacred texts, religious traditions and beliefs have become secondary in shaping our life with those who are living with HIV and AIDS.

So I think we need to begin with some very deep soul-searching within our communities of faith, then some public confession and repentance, and then beginning to reframe from our own religious tradition text, a different response that is fully inclusive of people who are living with HIV and AIDS.

As a Christian, Jesus is always going to lead me to stand alongside of someone that I would prefer to avoid and often probably stigmatize. And Jesus says, "There God is present." And if you want to be present where God is present in the world, you better be standing there.

And I think that kind of courage is what is being called for and what is being seen in religious communities often today throughout the world.

**CAROL GORE:** And our final question, in this segment is, "What would it take to get all the way there?" And I think maybe the best way to handle this would be to just run down the table. We'll start with you, Farid, and then work back toward me. What would it take?

**FARID ESACK:** Sure. It's a difficult one. What would it take to get all the way there? Quite frankly, I

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don't think that religious communities have what it takes to get all the way there.

I think that the radical questions that are presented for us by the pandemic, we simply don't have the courage or the resources to deal with them. And I'm talking about the theological resources. One of the questions for example, is why have we not delivered on making PWAs an intrinsic part of our work, an intensive part—

**CAROL GORE:** Farid, you'll have to help our audience. PWAs?

**FARID ESACK:** Oh, persons living with AIDS. Why have we not made them an intrinsic part of our work? We can't afford to. When we make persons with AIDS a full part of our work, it means acknowledging awkward things. It means acknowledging sex work. It means acknowledging men who have sex with men.

And these are areas that we are terrified of going to. For much of us, our religious lives, it is about power. It is about how do we control hierarchies? How do we control our communities?

And when we go into those areas, you go into the realm of the unfathomable of that which can't be controlled. And so it requires in fact a radical rethink of what our own religious lives are about.

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Is it about a set of dogma, a set of religious rules, which are [inaudible]? Or is it something intangible, a struggle to get closeness to God and a struggle to find the presence of God in the most vulnerable?

But as our religious communities are structured at the moment, and our obsession with power and institutionalization, we don't have any option but to, at worst, treat people living with AIDS as the disease, as pariahs, or at best the objects of our pity and our compassion and our concerns.

But they will always be "out there." It is only once we refigure what we are really all about as religious people, that we would be able to go all out in ensuring that they are partners in the transformation of their own lives, but above all, in the transformation of us as religious communities.

**CAROL GORE:** So in many ways—

[Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** -you are echoing what Jape and what Bishop Hanson have said, a degree of openness that is perhaps risky, perhaps scary. And now we'll ask Buonchaury. What would it take to truly include people with HIV AIDS in our religious communities?

**PHRAMAHA BUONCHAURY DOOJAI:** The first thing I think is that the leadership of the monks or just people in the church or in the temple, they are to get information. They

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are to understand. They are to try to make people accept to all this happening.

And also, we have to give an opportunity to women to be a leader and to set up their own, maybe their own group of people living with HIV and AIDS and they can use the temple ground to be a center for their activities inside of the temple.

And also, we, as a religious leader we can also improve the specialty and also to get support from the local level, financially, the other things that can be supported by the local level.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much, Buonchaury, and we will finish Commitment One with Vishnu. What would it take to truly include people with HIV AIDS in our religious community?

**VISHNU DIMERAY:** From the Hindu side, we are in very much basic level but we do something actual that make a commitment that that at least higher and influential religious leaders is started to speak. The problem of HIV and also that gives some preaching and collects larger number of funds to help people living with HIV.

So this is very change for Nepal and [inaudible] Hindu religion. And I found that in Christianity it was very much beginning but in Hindu religion usually this kind of activity wasn't before. But that Bangkok conference

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sensitized us and then we merged some plans and then after in grass roots level also Hindu religious leaders who already came.

[Inaudible] I'm working not for the Hindu religious leaders, other kind of [inaudible] and Muslim and Christian also. And they started to go to the home and psychological support and counseling and this kind of activity is happening in Nepal.

So at the same time, this kind of supportive activity is coming from those Hindu leaders or other kind of religious leaders who got the opportunities of sensitize and understanding HIV issues and I found these kinds of things.

So in all over the country and maybe among other kind of religious leaders, who did not have this kind of system, they believe that HIV not a problem or it's a problem because of sin and this is punishment of God. Still this kind of judgmental attitudes towards people living with HIV is existing in these communities. Thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much Vishnu. We will now move on to Commitment Two. I should apologize for the competition from the neighboring room. I'm afraid there is not very much we can do about that.

But if there is, at any point, any of the speakers you are having trouble hearing, can you just raise your hand or signal in some way and we'll do something about that?

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Also, I will remind you that we have volunteers going up and down the aisles with question cards. I'm not going to be able to ask all the right questions. Many of you have much deeper knowledge of these subjects than I do and we really are interested in your questions.

The second commitment religious leaders made in Bangkok two years ago was to promote teaching and preaching about HIV and AIDS in places of worship, at educational events and community gatherings, and to provide accurate information about ways to prevent the virus from spreading.

Farid, maybe we can go to you first for some examples about how religious communities are getting the message out.

**FARID ESACK:** I think that in the last two years there has certainly been an escalation of Muslim concern in religious circles on the question of HIV and AIDS. This is seen in gatherings that have been held in the last two years in Indonesia and in Algiers, in Iran, in Damascus and in Cairo.

And in all of these gatherings on the whole, the tenor of debate and so on was much higher than in the past where it was just about scorn and damnation. And there has been a cautious welcoming of all effective measures, which is often code for condoms, a cautious condonation of condomization. I was just playing around.

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And within a cautious welcoming of all measures that are scientifically and at the same time there's always a privileging of the religious message of abstinence and no sex outside marriage.

So on the whole there's been an escalation. There has been a great involvement on the part of a number of governments in religious programs. I can think of Morocco immediately, I can think of Egypt immediately, and I can think of Malaysia immediately.

By the way, I'm also engaged in a mapping project for U.N. AIDS on religious responses throughout the Muslim world. So I've been having a careful look at how different countries have been responding to it.

So there has been an escalation of good rhetoric in mosques and so on, but not nearly enough I think. And I think that Muslims, most Muslims, are still at the stage of "it's a pity" and "we feel sorry" and it sometimes goes to compassion. But it's not really about us yet.

The message that we get it is still the price of the fallen. If you fall, we will forgive you. If you fall, we will care for you and we will look after you. It's our responsibility to not reject you after you have fallen. But it is the price that you pay for having fallen. And if you all of you, if all others of you do not watch out, you will also fall.

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And so it is still very much connected to sin and the price of sin. There is a more gentle attitude now developing towards the culpable, towards the guilty. But the understanding that people have sinned and are paying the price, that is still very, very much the dominant image in the Muslim world.

And the question of course often with teaching and preaching is, with accurate information, what is accurate information? For many people, accurate information is that if you do this you will end up in Hell. This is accurate information.

Sadly, in much of the Muslim world, HIV and AIDS prevention programs, the AIDS phenomenon itself, it is still very much mired in a whole host of different kinds of conspiracy theories, denial mechanisms that it doesn't really happen to us.

If it does, it happens to sinful Muslims or to these faggots, or to these black people who have kind of invaded our country or, you know it's the Moroccan immigrants, or it's all the under classes. It doesn't happen to normal society.

And sadly, this still underpins much of the messages on the pandemic in the Muslim world. But again, on a positive note, there has been much of an increase in more positive messages in the last two years.

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**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. So progress but a long way to go, and Buonchaury, perhaps you could give us a Buddhist perspective on this.

**PHRAMAHA BUONCHAURY DOOJAI:** In a Buddhist community in Thailand we have done a lot of teaching and preaching programs in temple like we have a preaching program on every Buddhist holiday. We have an exhibition. We have a campaign, we have youth camp, you know, one day or even one night sometimes, or one week.

During summer season, you know, the people, the youths, during vacation they come to the temple and during the summer camp for the whole vacation. Getting them sometimes ordained as a Buddhist monk or novices and to leave and practice a Buddhist way of life inside of the monastery.

And sometimes we also have people living with an HIV AIDS camp. And in the hospital we have also the counseling room inside of the hospital, for the monks to go and to give the counseling there inside of the hospital, and [inaudible] visit also there.

At the community level we have home visit. That is common for every religion and preaching in every special occasion. And very recently I have a special program for the Buddhist monk student in my university to train them to know the general knowledge of HIV and AIDS.

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And we have also fieldwork practice for them and right now we have our senior monk student training the junior monk student now. This is, I think, something we learn that religious leader bridging the gap between people, the government organization and the temple.

And the religious leader, when we train, when we do this work, it is easy to view up the alliance to pulling up, giving up, gearing up the program and also to distribute the information to the others. And more than that what we learn is that training a young monk is easier than training the other monks. Thanks.

**CAROL GORE:** Jape, perhaps we could hear from you about how well some of the Christian denominations are doing in moving from judging and condemnation to genuinely giving out information and reaching out to people with HIV and AIDS.

**JAPE HEATH:** I think that there's been a dramatic increase in dialogue and teaching around HIV and AIDS. I can just think that the World Council of Churches has their ecumenical HIV and AIDS initiative in Africa, which has produced a number of books.

Nordic Forkeesa [misspelled?] is producing the one-body manuals that look specifically at this in terms of HIV and AIDS education, and Worldvision is also looking very strongly in the channels of hope trying to get good information out there.

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But you know, I want to say very strongly that just giving more teaching and more preaching isn't the answer because very frequently, more teaching and more preaching can be the wrong teaching and the wrong preaching.

One example of that is that Worldvision in the Channels of Hope program were asking questionnaires of pastors in Uganda where abstinence and being prayerful messages have been very strongly given over the last period.

And in January of this year, the survey that they conducted showed that 84-percent of pastors in Uganda still believe that HIV and AIDS is God's punishment for sin. So just increasing the teaching and the preaching isn't the answer. We have to make sure that when we give messages, we're actually giving the right messages.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. Dulce, perhaps you'd like to talk about this. What are you doing in the Caribbean to get the message out?

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** Yes, the organization that I basically do my secular work with, which is Worldvision. It's an [inaudible] working in our country. It's basically providing wide coverage throughout the country in this task of awareness raising.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

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**INTERPRETER:** And then, yes the church and the leaders, they're all doing a great task of awareness raising. They are talking to people, to teachers, to various sectors of society and bringing this message to all the people in the various communities providing education, talking about prevention and awareness raising in general.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** So basically what is being done is we have sort of caretakers in the best sense, people taking care of others, doing home visits to people living with AIDS, helping them in their daily lives.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** And also financial support and medical support with medications. Not talking about antimicrobials but general medication, also helping in terms of dietary needs, food and others.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** In the areas in my country where Worldvision is active, there are a number of pastors and churches that are ready to go. They're ready and willing and totally ready to go.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** Thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. And we will ask Bishop Hanson to wrap up this segment of the program.

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**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** Just a quick point. This will be difficult for religious communities. But I think we need to strive to differentiate ourselves as communities of moral formation and deliberation, which we are, but also places that are willing to teach safe sex.

Though those are related, I think those need to become much more clearly distinctive if we are going to be safe places for people to talk openly about sexuality but also to be safe places where people living with HIV and AIDS are full members of the community.

We need to get rid of the word "them" and "those people" and use only the word "us" because the church, religious communities, are living with HIV and AIDS.

[Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. The third commitment religious leaders made in Bangkok was to use the structures that religious communities have built to deliver health, education, and community development to serve and support those living with HIV.

As most of you know, the religious communities form one of the largest civil society institutions around the globe. And what we want to talk about now is how well they're using that capacity to carry out the AIDS mission. And Vishnu, perhaps you can begin.

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**VISHNU DIMERAY:** Yes. Within two years, we were able to make a change, something in these areas from villages [inaudible]. I want to share with you that incident from Nepal. We had one kind of training session to give love, action plan among the village leaders, how they can help—how they can integrate HIV activities into their villages, activities.

And then not only those type of things, religion to gender aspect and leading to sexual violence and religion access to health activities. And we found that when they made the plan and [inaudible] activities also happened there, we had a research on what [inaudible] to us gender and violence, trafficking and girl's and women's access to education, health, all those things.

So we need to have sometimes this kind of theological [inaudible]. We need to explore that kind of supportive base from the religious aspect because they believe on God and they don't believe other kinds of activities, so what God says.

And then God says this kinds of things in [inaudible]. And God says this kinds of things in here and there. Then they started to work against this kind of gender violence and even in a district level they have some plans and working in this area.

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So I can't share regarding the national level but in some districts we had a pilot project to do that. And we found that very much [inaudible] the change there attitude. At the same time we also had them to how to dialogue on that issues. And [inaudible] enough, [inaudible] evolved in these areas.

So sometimes they are having that very much traditional skill, that kind of preaching skill rather than educating people without any judgmental issues and then [inaudible] from God and exploring the social welfare things. So they need this kind of help from us.

And they need some opportunity to [inaudible] their capacity, what we want to help from them. So I found very much effective in this project. At the same time, it is not enough to sustain these kinds of activities within the religious infrastructure.

We need to help them continue and we need to follow up continue. And we need to also help them to access some resources, to access the, to deliver the necessary services. So these are our lessons from Nepal. Thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much, Vishnu. Farid, can I get you to talk about where religious communities are falling short and what is it that's getting in the way?

**FARID ESACK:** Yes. One of the awkward things about forums like this is, well, the first awkward thing about a

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forum like this is that there's always one Muslim, and one Buddhist and so-on and then three or four Christians.

And sometimes because of logistics, but it also really reinforces this whole thing that, oh these Moslims, it's just one blob out there. But with Christians we are nuance. We understand denominations, we understand trends, we understand sex, and so on.

But these Moslims, you know, they're just "the Moslims." So that's one of the problems that I have often when I have to speak in panels like this. The nuances of other traditions are recognized, the nuances of my own tradition is not recognized.

The second awkwardness that I have is kind of, you're a Muslim, and you're supposed to be, nobody says, but you're supposed to be a representative of your faith.

And when you're a representative of your faith, particularly of a religious group that on the whole has its back against the wall, you have to say nice things. You have to put a good foot forward, bat for our side. Say nice things about the Muslim community; don't let the side down.

And it's kind of awkward because I don't know if I bat for any side. I bat for HIV and AIDS, I bat for justice, I bat for gender justice. I am a Muslim. I work within the Muslim community. Do I want to come here and bat for this

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blob out there called "the Muslim community"? I don't know if I want to do that.

Anyway but to answer the question, after having said some of my background issues on this—

**CAROL GORE:** You're welcome to talk about obstacles that are standing in the way of other religious communities too.

**FARID ESACK:** I think that on the one level, yes, there has been an increase in work. There has been an increase in support and so-on. But we are only prepared to support for as long as we can be in control. We don't want the discourse to shift.

And so if it is, and even that we're bad at in terms of there isn't a single hospice, for example, in the Muslim world for people who are terminally ill. Forget about people that are actually dying of AIDS.

We are trapped between myths of our society that we care for the elderly, we care for orphans and therefore we don't build orphanages. It's a shame to build an orphanage.

So we're caught between the myth of Muslims don't have sex outside marriage, therefore you don't provide condoms, the myth of who we think we are and the reality of who we really are.

And so when we do respond to this reality, we respond always it is in terms of control, the [inaudible], the law.

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But it's control. It's the control of men. Men and their visions of the world and religious leaders when you talk about religious leadership we're talking about men in the Muslim world.

And so we aren't prepared to go to caring and pity because all [inaudible] to control, when it comes to actual empowerment, when it comes to the actual transformation of lives of people, it's a very awkward space for us to go.

It's in part why the church loves to and does a very good job of touting all the different kind of things that it does for victims of AIDS, because it's about pity and it's about help and caring and so on.

When you ask the Church to have a conversation with Catholics for a free choice, we're not interested in Catholics for a free choice. When you ask the Church to have a conversation with Condoms for Life, no, we don't want to talk to them because Condoms for Life and Catholics for a free choice, it is about choice. It is about women taking control of their own lives.

And so the major obstacle for me in this whole religious approach to the thing, this whole religious approach to HIV and AIDS and how we are dealing with people living with HIV and AIDS, we are privileged. Our structures, our powers, and the interpretive magus of that, the clerics, we are privileged all of that over human life.

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And when we privilege all of that over human life and then we get engaged in dances of power and always calculating, okay, so this HIV and AIDS thing has become a big thing. The Church is going to be left out of this, then we're going to not be able to wield the influence that we should. So let's get on board this HIV and AIDS thing.

Meanwhile, the feminist lobby and the gay lobby who have been in this whole thing for years, can you please put us at the booth not near to this? Can you please not have them on our panels and so on?

And so for me, prophetic religion is about the edges. And until and unless we don't understand that it is only prophetic religion that can respond to this pandemic, until then I think all our work and so on with institutions and so on, will only serve to reconfigure the structures of power that are in the first place responsible for this pandemic and the disproportionate toll that it is taking on women, and on black people, and on poor people.

[Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** Jape have any lessons been learned?

**JAPE HEATH:** I think when Anerela was founded three years ago, it was very hard for faith communities to even admit that there were people within the faith communities living with HIV, let alone religious leaders living with HIV.

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Now we're sitting with a membership of just over 1,500 in Africa alone and I think by the mere presence of our existence we are saying we are there and HIV is real. I think too, that there have been lessons learned in terms of ways in which we can approach things like prevention.

And some agencies like Christian Aid have been very proactive and been able to take on board inclusive messages of prevention where we expand [inaudible] to something that covers all means of transmission so that we move away from messages that are stigmatizing.

**CAROL GORE:** ABC, anything but condoms?

**JAPE HEATH:** ABC, we want to speak about AB. I always say it's a very big "A." It's abstinence because then there's no sex thank God. And there's a much smaller "B" because that mean's there's some sex going on.

And then the "C," then we don't talk about it at all. But realistically we have to speak about the prevention of mother to child transmission as well. We have to speak about safe blood. We have to speak about needle exchange. We have to speak about the reduction of sexual partners.

We have to speak about all means of transmission, and more than that we also have to make sure that we make treatment available, because treatment is a very effective means of prevention.

Someone who is using [inaudible] anti-virals

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effectively is reducing the chances of transmission maybe from one in 1,000 to one in 25,000, much better than using condoms for instances.

We have to speak about the fact that we have to allow people to know their HIV status, because for me one of the things that is still driving this pandemic the most is the fact that the majority of people, 90-percent of people living with HIV don't know their HIV status and are carrying on their lives as if nothing has happened.

And finally we have to empower people. We have to make sure that people have the tools to be able to make informed decisions for themselves. So, yes I do think there are lessons being learned. I think it's very slow, but I think we're getting there in places.

**CAROL GORE:** And Bishop Hanson, what would it take to take to get all the way there?

**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** I think we have to name the fact that we have diminished the capacity of our working together because we still distrust one another as religious communities.

I was in Indonesia recently for a Lutheran Muslim conversation about working together after the Tsunami. The first two days we had to simply work through the reality that the Muslim participants distrusted the Christians believing we were there to evangelize.

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And the Christians distrusted the Muslims thinking they were there to politicize. We have to name the distrust and work through it. We also have to acknowledge that too often the self-interest of religious based relief development organizations' health care providers prevails over the reality of the lives of the people in local communities, their rituals, their leadership.

And so we come in preoccupied with getting attention, getting recognition, getting our market share, getting so that we can spin the story around to get more donors. And I think we have to look to dying to our own self-interests for the sake of living for and living with people who have HIV and AIDS.

Finally, quite unrelated but until we can get the politicians of the world to quit letting terrorism become the defining reality for the world but in a sense hijacks all of us in a state of fear, and transform the priorities of the world to be fully those of humanity and the very Creation itself, I think we're going to have a very difficult time, because we're being socialized and politicized into a culture of fear that makes the challenge even greater. [Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** Well that's going to be a tough challenge. The fourth and perhaps toughest commitment that religious leaders made two years ago to show leadership in combating the marginalization and stigmatization of those

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living with or affect by HIV and AIDS.

And Bishop Hansen, perhaps you could draw on your worldwide experience to tell us some good news.

[Interposing]

**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** Feels like I have another voice, [laughter]. If you like what he's saying just pay attention to him. So—

**CAROL:** Just talk loud.

**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** I'll talk louder. Well I indicated earlier, but I want to reinforce, that if we're sincere about implementing policies to combat the stigma of persons living with HIV and AIDS, we have to first, most of our religious communities need to publicly repent and confess of our complicity in the perpetuation of stigmatization and marginalization of people living with HIV and AIDS.

We have been complicit by our silence. We have been complicit by our shaming words and deeds. We have been complicit by the way we framed the moral, the bait. We have been complicit by our perpetuating and participating in systems of sexual violence, particularly violence against women.

We have been complicit by our failure to listen, to walk with, to learn from, and follow the leadership of people living with HIV and AIDS. There are many devastating illnesses that hit families, communities, religious parishes,

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mosques, synagogues, and temples.

But we need to acknowledge the particularity of the stigmatization that is attached to HIV and AIDS, and we must confront it first in a spirit of repentance.

Then I also think we have to claim our capacity to do differently and do better. A universal thread that unites this very interdependent globe is that in virtually every community in the world we had in the bush, in a metropolitan neighborhood, in a small town or the suburbs, is that people gather as religious communities to worship.

They gather for education. They gather to be formed for their life in the world. And we have to claim the capacity we have to be centers not only of education and intervention, but centers of advocacy, centers of change. And I think we haven't fully claimed our capacity.

But I also think if we're going to confront the stigma, we have a responsibility to work collaboratively. This cannot be a task that the religious communities take on singularly. We need to be the third leg in the response stool with civil society in the public realm and in the private sector.

Too often I've heard here of the two legged stool. I think it's a three-legged stool of response. But finally I think we have to be much more transparent and accountable to one another and for each other.

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When I led an interfaith delegation to meet with Condoleeza Rice to hold President Bush' Administration accountable for their commitment to the millennium development goals, we needed to have our homework done.

We actually had a letter from the White House Budget Director to the House Appropriations Committee outline the President's priorities, and there was not any reference to the MBG's there that we were able to pull out.

We have to mobilize people to hold elected officials accountable, even as we need to be expected to be held accountable as religious leaders, which is going to mean creating tension in the religious community not just alleviating it.

And tension will be necessary if there's going to be long-term change. And I think we on the panel are about creating that tension as we make and keep our commitments.  
[Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. Peace Nu [misspelled?], can you tell us a little about stigmatization in Nepal, and what the Hindu community is doing to fight it?

**PEACE NU:** In Nepal we are not able to make the policy yet in villages' institution in national level. But in local level at least they have made consensus. We don't have to all use this kind of war, and we don't have to this kind of behavior to people living with HIV, and the

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[inaudible] consensus.

And on the basis of these things, and also we need to advocate that Hindu we're in the [inaudible], and also [inaudible] to develop these kinds of things and make them more responsible towards these things. So we are very much behind to develop this kind of policy in national level.

And you know Nepal's situation. Before, sometimes there is big conflict. And it still, this is cease fire and people in the higher level, they anyway, interested in the policy.

So they didn't give very much impasses on these HIV issues. And it's totally sad now under the political leaders and also among our national Hindu religious leaders. So we have to do lots of things towards it.

And I already said that a least we have some result doing by [inaudible] that what are the total legal aspect? What got this to the nationalist people like woman and girls? Then are people living [inaudible] how can we can rescue them. They to develop these kinds of research report.

And research report finds that, yes, there are lots of, and God never said that to do sexual violence and this kind of [inaudible] woman, or maybe gender [inaudible].

And also God never said that we should again, condemn who are in the difficult situation. God always said that, "We need to have, we need to give our hand, of help those people

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who are in a difficult situation."

So I hope from this research we'll go ahead to develop more, to inference, to develop policy in religious institution. Thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. Buonchaury, can you give us a bit of a perspective from your part of the world and your faith?

**PHRAMAHA BUONCHAURY DOOJAI:** Yes, since Buddhist institution is not other religion, we have our own administration, like in Thailand, Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhism in Laos, in Meoma, in Cambodia, in Vietnam, even in China.

So I think in the level, in different level like in Thailand in provincial level, even in higher level, the involvement of the monks, the higher monks in the position is quite, you know taking part in the HIV/AIDS program.

Last meeting before International AIDS Conference in Bangkok we have pre-conference, Buddhist pre-conference, acting Supreme [inaudible] of the Thai Buddhist Sunga, Thai Buddhist Organization, he preside over the meeting of the pre-conference of Thai of the Buddhist all over the world.

And when I was in Vietnam, you know, to meet with the monks working there in Vietnam, in the prevention level I think the monks are really, really active in working to fight with HIV and AIDS. And in [inaudible], the monks who are in

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the higher position, they also take part in working against HIV and AIDS.

So in general I think in Southeast Asian country, there's not that much stigma and discrimination inside of the religious institution.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much and Farid, we'll get you to wrap up this session. How much genuine openness is there to the kind of working together, the kind of collaboration that Bishop Hanson was talking about?

**FARID ESACK:** I think that in the Muslim world there are two very different, in fact contrasting terms as far as this openness is concerned. Firstly I agree with you, Bishop, that very simple no ways that one tackles a pandemic like this in any kind, I have the best answer, response.

And this is also; I mean what is regrettable about how the United States is going about not only its foreign policy but also its Aid's policies that we will set up something apart from U.N. AIDS, something apart from the global fund. We will have our own little show as part of this whole homogenization in the [inaudible] for a particular country's agenda.

And so there's no way that any religious group or any religious community can go along and say that we have the answers. You see that sometimes in the religious right-winged rhetoric where people say, "Christianity is the

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answer," or "Islam is the answer."

And you look at their logic in general. Gosh, you know, they did a carbon copy of each other. Have they ever thought of talking to each other and seeing how much they have in common with each other? So this is the first thing. There is no going it alone.

Inside the Muslim world there are two tendencies at the moment as far as this going it alone question is. The one is that gosh, you know, we've got our backs against the wall. We really have to find ways of changing things, and amending things, and so on to make ourselves more likeable.

These people are very, very powerful. If we want to do business with them, if we want to get visas for their countries, if we want them to invest in our countries, we simply have to do something to make ourselves more moderate, more likeable.

And there are these many, many projects in the Muslim world a part of the Civilizing the Barbarians Project to make these Muslims more compliant subjects - essentially subjects, but subjects of the empire.

And so Muslims are trying hard to wriggle into this new, this thing. So that is the one response.

On the other hand, there is also tremendous resistance, resistance, anger, and so on, anger at occupation of Muslim lands, anger at what's happening in Lebanon, anger

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at the ongoing occupation of Palestine, and a whole host of other things.

And so that kind of anger really causes people to become more inward. More inward we have the answers - the only way is to resist totally. And we'll resist of this whole HIV and AIDS thing by also clamping down on our women - as if women are owned by us.

So we close our borders, we close our women. There is a greater clamor for the Shariatization [misspelled?] of Muslim societies as part of immunizing ourselves against the empire.

So what we can't win on the economic fields. There's nothing that we can do about McDonald's taking over our societies, or about, you know, nothing that we can do about it.

We can try to win in other fields. Try to win it by insisting, I mean in Indonesia we have just come from recently, for example, all this pornoaxy [misspelled?], the laws against porno action, meaning holding hands in public, or kissing in public.

So a great tightening, closing of the walls on the one hand, and on the other hand a frustration that nothing that we do seems to be good enough for these people who are bent on controlling our lives and our economic resources, particularly when we have oil.

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I'm sorry to end on such a note, but why should I apologize for ending on that note? That's it.

**CAROL GORE:** Well it's not quite the ending yet (Applause]. You've been a very patient and very engaged audience. As you will notice we are running a bit overtime.

We're going to take about another 15 minutes because we were so delayed with technical glitches at the beginning. If some of you want to drift out, we will certainly be understanding.

But I've some really good questions from the audience here that I would like to put to our panel. So for those who are prepared to stay, we would very much appreciate it.

Here is a fascinating question. Do any of the religious groups reach out to people who do not belong to their religious community or who have no belief at all, showing love to everyone without discrimination? Jape Heath, do you want to take a crack at that one?

**JAPE HEATH:** I think that the short answer for that question is, "Yes." And I'll just give you one example from my own context.

When we founded ANERELA, one of the first things that we said was we were going to found the African network of Christian leaders who were living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS.

But on closer examination we had to say that stigma

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and discrimination, which is the force related to HIV and AIDS which we must fight, is something which is not only experienced within the Christian context.

And from that perspective even though at our launch we didn't have members from other faith groups, we had to make a commitment to try and work with other faith communities, and trying to reach out and work together in terms of breaking stigma wherever we found it.

So that's why we founded the network for religious leaders. It's not been easy. It's been very challenging. But it's been one of the most successful ways in which we really have had a voice that we can speak in all contexts.

And unless we actually choose to work with people who we not necessarily consider our own constituency, there's no answer for this.

**CAROL GORE:** Bishop Hanson?

**BISHOP MARK HANSON:** The Lutheran World Federation is absolutely committed in its actions to be non-discriminatory in all of its projects, both in terms of who it employs in local communities and who it serves.

Now we obviously keep having to be accountable and check that. But examples all over the world are of non-discriminatory fully participatory programs of people of no faith and people of various religious beliefs.

**CAROL GORE:** I'm going to move on simply because of

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the constraints of time. And Dulce, I'd like to address this question to you. I'm sure we all knew this one was going to come up. What role can you envision religious institutions taking in advocating change in restructuring the ABC approach to AIDS prevention that is anything but condoms?

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** Truly, from within the religious community that I'm working with, and I'm working very closely in there, we put our emphasis on prevention, and we do promote condoms.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** We face a reality and these realities have many things and not controllable. They get out of our hands. So you provide this information to the person.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** So basically what I'm saying is that we work on prevention without any fears, without any taboos, we speak our mind. We do this not only with the people involving our religious community, but also with those who do not belong to our religious communities but who come to work with us because they want to help.

**DULCE MIOSOTIS ALEJO ESPINAL:** [Speaking in Spanish].

**INTERPRETER:** But as Christians the first way, the best way of prevention is abstinence or fidelity. Thank you.

**CAROL GORE:** Thank you very much. Anybody else want

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to take a crack at that? Buonchaury? Oh I'm sorry, Jape Heath.

**JAPE HEATH:** Yes. I want to very strongly advocate for a more comprehensive approach to prevention. And that's why I spoke earlier about safe, safer practices, available medication, voluntary counseling and testing, and empowerment through education.

Unless we adopt a more comprehensive approach, messages in themselves are going to continue to be stigmatizing and the stigma is going to continue to drive this pandemic.

**CAROL GORE:** I think we've got time for one more question. It's a tough one. Most religious communities are struggling with the tension between protecting and promoting the purity of the community and living out the compassion inclusiveness and justice.

Which wins out, a pure community or a just community? How can religious leadership be effective in resolving this tension? Farid, do you want to talk about that?

**FARID ESACK:** I think that the idea of a pure community is a myth. There is no pure community. All of us are human beings. All of us, and while I'm, Muslims do not believe in the idea of original sin.

But from other angles all of us err. All of us sin. And when you have communities who are living in tension

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between being carriers of the spirit of God on the one hand and on the other hand inevitably sinful lives, there is no idea of a pure community.

When you want to reduce your community to a sociological entity, then you can keep it pure. You can say this is this local white community. This is this local community that lives on the mountain and we are only from the [inaudible]." Then you can talk about purity.

Religion by itself is essentially about; it is about the struggle to find the human in all of us in relation to the divine. It is about the struggle to find the presence of God in the most marginalized of our people.

And that is why I always, I'm amazed that none of the founders of our religions ever had an essential question, "How do I preserve community, or how do I fit in with the power structures in my community."

These were questions that the founders of our faith ask. The founders of our faith always ask, "How do I identify with the marginalized, and how do I disturb the power? How do I disturb the power if the power does not serve the ends of justice?"

And so our lives are only, we are only communities, worthwhile and meaningful communities insofar as we are struggling to get closer to God and struggling to get closer to lives of justice.

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[Inaudible] served an old community of people who wear pink clothes, community of people of long noses. These are all biological accidents.

Our ethical and theological imperatives are to look justly and identify with those on the edges, and make trouble for those in power if they serve against those who are on the edges of society. [Applause]

**CAROL GORE:** We need to wrap this up. I hope you will join me in thanking our panelists. I think they've been extraordinarily honest and insightful. And thank you also for being an excellent audience. [Applause]

**JAMES CAIRNS:** And let's thank Carol for really handling this set of challenging issues and a large panel and some tough environment grilling. Carol, thank you so much again for being with us. [Applause]

As you go let me make two comments in response to some things. We had a lot of questions. And I want to let you know that they were not disappearing after this session.

We're going to take these cards. We're going to work with them to see how they can be presented as ongoing challenges to the faith communities as they work on these commitments.

I encourage you to look in the coming weeks on the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Web site and on the Religions for Peace Web site for the follow up to this session as we

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continue to disseminate and struggle with these challenging questions.

Lastly, there were several questions written about, "Why are there no Catholics on this panel?" I think it's important to just touch on that because it was raised.

We were expecting to have - and we had arranged to have - the head of a major Catholic hospital in Cameroon on this panel. She was in a car accident about six weeks ago, was told not to travel.

And her replacement really struggled to get a visa in time. We believe she's actually arriving this afternoon, and so sadly will have missed a chance to be here. But I just thought it was important to address that issue.

We hope that through this panel, we're starting to expand what we understand to be leadership within our faith communities.

It's a diverse way that we lead and try to engage our faiths to challenge and struggle within our communities, but overall to try to be better in responding to the challenges that AIDS puts before us. Thank you all for coming, enjoy the rest of the conference and enjoy your day today.

[Applause]

[END RECORDING]

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