

Twenty Five Years After AIDS is Discovered, Commitment to Preventing Its Spread Remains Weak

By Lacey Haussamen

In June 1981, scientists in the United States reported the first clinical evidence of a disease that would later become known as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS. As early as 1985, at least one case of HIV was reported in every major region of the globe. Twenty five years later, the AIDS epidemic has spread: more than 40 million people are living with HIV today, and over 25 million have died of AIDS.

Though the Joint United Nations Program on AIDS (UNAIDS) became operational in 1996, the UN Security Council did not discuss the virus until 2000. Soon after, a Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS was announced, pledging worldwide cooperation in fighting the spread of the disease. In June of this year, the UN held a special session to assess the world's progress five years later. Though some positive decisions were made, the overall outcomes of the meeting were disappointing, and evidence of genuine commitment in the fight against global AIDS is lacking.



Sizakele Keswa, 13, holds the only picture of her deceased mother in South Africa. There are currently over 12 million AIDS orphans worldwide.

Failure to aggressively address the impact of the disease will take the worst toll on the most impoverished people in our world. As a result of poverty, conflict, violence against women and girls, a lack of appropriate education, high-risk behavior, gender inequality and a number of other socioeconomic factors, people living in the least developed regions, such as many countries in Africa, are most adversely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

HIV/AIDS and Africa Today

After 25 years of attention, the escalation of global AIDS continues. In 2005 alone, five

(Continued on page 2)

25 Years of AIDS	1
Peace in Sight in Uganda?	3
Election Prospects in Congo	3
Action Calendar	4
AIDS Foundation to Host Luncheon	4
Fr. Bill's Parting Reflections	5
Darfur Update	5
Staff Changes	6
Legislative Watch	6
Happenings in Brief	7

(Continued from page 1)

million people were newly infected. Over 3 million people died last year of AIDS, 570,000 of whom were children under the age of fifteen. 25.8 million of those infected live in sub-Saharan Africa, the worst affected region in the world. Just ten percent of the world's population lives in sub-Saharan Africa, yet the region is home to 60 percent of the world's HIV/AIDS infections. In countries such as Lesotho and Swaziland, up to 1 in 3 adults is infected.

There is a worldwide trend whereby the disease is linked to those marginalized by society because of their gender, age, race, social or economic status or sexual orientation. A vicious cycle has emerged in which poverty, in particular, creates conditions favorable to the spread of the virus, and AIDS in turn deepens the poverty of affected families and communities. Impoverished and marginalized people have limited access to resources such as health care information and services.

The effects of the pandemic are unmistakably harsher on women and children. Seventy-seven per cent of all new infections in sub-Saharan Africa are among women and young girls. In order to support themselves and their families, women are often forced to adopt behaviors that expose them to HIV infection.

AIDS has also caused a bulging population of orphaned youth who are in danger of growing up in an environment devoid of care and guidance. The scale of this tragedy is difficult to comprehend. Every 14 seconds, another child is orphaned by AIDS. Throughout the world, some 15 million children have been left parentless. Most, about 12 million, are in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, the total could surpass 25 million. Paulina Muchina of UNAIDS says, "Why is it that we don't love our children the way they deserve to be loved? It is our moral responsibility to protect these children."

The disease wipes out the most productive sector of society, undermining economic development efforts, and threatening to keep entire generations of people caught in a cycle of poverty, poor health, exploitation and death. In order to make treatment sustainable, health systems in impoverished countries need to be critically assessed, strengthened and scaled up.

What Lies Ahead

In 2000, UN member nations agreed to pursue benchmarks

for human development known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs aim to galvanize the international action necessary to halve extreme poverty, provide universal access to primary education, promote gender equity, and halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. Though the goals are supposed to be met by 2015, very few impoverished nations are on track to meeting them, and even fewer rich nations are providing the assistance they pledged, including the U.S. Millions of lives hang in the balance as international leaders now disavow their previous commitment to more fully respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

People of faith are uniquely called to work to ease the suffering of millions of people worldwide, especially in Africa. With all of the progress African countries have made in prevention education, medical treatment, stigma reduction and improvement in quality of life, the AIDS pandemic is still spreading and affecting more people daily. How can we, the Church, claim to stand in solidarity with Africa unless we face this problem with full force and address the underlying causes of poverty, conflict and inequality that exacerbate this pandemic?

Perhaps many people do not take action because they cannot see up close the devastation of AIDS. If people really saw this, they would insist that something be done. Unfortunately the people who have the resources to defeat global AIDS do not see the worst of it, and

those who see and live it everyday most often lack the resources to address it.

As a country with plentiful resources, the U.S. must take responsibility to care for and work with brothers and sisters of other lands. The U.S. government could be much more proactive in leading the world to find lasting solutions to the AIDS crisis.

President Bush announced in 2003 the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, a five year, \$15 billion plan to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS around the world. While the initiative is a welcome investment in this cause, it has faced serious challenges. Funding is often irregular, causing cutoffs in medical treatment. Drugs purchased in the Plan come from U.S. companies, as opposed to companies in India and South Africa that offer cheaper generic drugs. And much of the funding is tied to "behavior change" programming which often does not match commonly understood best practices in dealing with the disease.

(Continued on page 3)



A doctor tends to an AIDS patient in Benin.

Uganda Peace Process Brings Hope to Displaced

Following a recent meeting between Southern Sudanese Vice President Riek Machar and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony, peace talks have been organized and are currently taking place in Juba, Sudan between representatives of the LRA and Government of Uganda. Past attempts at negotiations (1994, 1998, 2001, 2004) failed due to a perceived lack of commitment from both parties.

The Juba initiative, however, seems to be the most promising in the twenty year history of the conflict. It is mediated by a third party (the government of southern Sudan) and comes at a time of increased pressure on all groups in the region to cease acts of violence. The Ugandan government has called for a rapid process to arrange for the surrender of LRA fighters, but rebel leaders have called for more substantive talks that also address longstanding grievances against the government.

While many Western governments have expressed concern over the possibility of offering amnesty from prosecution to LRA leaders as part of a peace deal, people in northern Uganda overwhelmingly support any agreement that will end the war and allow displaced persons to return home,

even if such an agreement includes amnesty for rebel leaders. Archbishop John Odama, to galvanize support for the talks, announced in mid July that, "Our people have suffered enough. They are tired of staying in camps."

The U.S. government has been moderate in its endorsement of the talks. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Jendayi Frazer announced during a recent visit to Uganda that, "We believe that the priority has to be peace. As for the pursuit of that peace, we are quite open on how we achieve it. But that is the priority: to stop the war." Subsequent statements from the U.S. Embassy in Kampala have however been more cautious, supporting the Ugandan government's willingness to talk peace but also calling for prosecution of LRA leaders.

For now, the world waits in apprehension as faint hope for an end to twenty years of terror for more than two million people in northern Uganda looms on the horizon.

Take Action Today!

Visit AFJN's website (www.afjn.org), click on the Uganda campaign link, and send a letter to your members of Congress urging support for this important initiative!

Congo Plans for Historic Elections Despite Challenges

On July 30th, for the first time since gaining independence in 1960, Congolese people will cast votes to elect their next President. Congo's only democratically-elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated in 1961 and replaced by 45 years of military despots and rebel leaders. During these years, the Congolese people have suffered through immense violence and repression.

While the election will not be a solution to Congo's ongo-

ing violence and instability (which in the last eight years has caused more deaths than any conflict since WWII), it will be an important first step. Much more national and international investment is needed to build infrastructure, disarm rebel groups, and develop a democratic culture. If international attention shifts away from the country following the elections, a very real danger exists that any forward momentum will be lost and a return to war imminent.

role to play in this fight, and AFJN will continue advocating for the responsible engagement of that role.

Today, all churches are living with and are affected by HIV/AIDS. Despite the many challenges that the HIV/AIDS pandemic presents, individuals, families and communities continue to face these with courage, hope and compassion.

AFJN's board, staff, and members thank Lacey for her tireless efforts for justice during her time at AFJN, and wish her the best as she attains a graduate degree in Public Health from Emory University!

(Continued from page 2)

AIDS is not just a health issue, it is a justice issue. Children are left parentless and forced to raise themselves, often causing them to drop out of school. Women in sub-Saharan Africa are three times more likely to become infected than men. AIDS is not only destroying families, but also entire communities, which in turn is destabilizing entire regions and weakening governments. Economies are suffering the loss of productive members of society and are struggling to bring people out of severe poverty. Such complex problems require serious commitment from everyone to find solutions that work. The U.S. has an integral

AIDS Foundation to Host Luncheon at AFJN Conference

Following the conclusion of AFJN's annual conference in October, the Touching Tiny Lives Foundation will host a luncheon to raise awareness about the effects of AIDS in Africa. Conference participants are invited to attend.

In the tiny southern African nation of Lesotho, an estimated 270,000 people – twenty-four percent of the productive population – live with HIV/AIDS. Globally, only the neighboring nations of Botswana and Swaziland suffer higher infection rates. This small mountain kingdom has become internationally recognized as an example of how relentlessly a pandemic exploits poverty and underdevelopment. Lesotho's staggering rate of infection orphans its youth; in 2005 there were 97,000 AIDS orphans in the country, a thirty percent increase since 2003.



Children at Touching Tiny Lives in Lesotho receive care to battle the effects of AIDS.

In the city and surrounding region of Mokhotlong, Lesotho, the Touching Tiny Lives (TTL) organization has taken hopeful steps toward engaging the AIDS pandemic. Founded by Notre Dame alumnus Ken Storen in 2004, TTL provides transitional care for infants who have been abandoned or severely neglected due to stigma, disease, or death by AIDS, and seeks to place those children back in

the local community with extended relatives or willing caregivers. Children are provided medical, nutritional, and emotional support, including AIDS anti-retroviral treatment, as necessary. Once placed back in the Mokhotlong community, TTL's medical, nutritional, and educational outreach extends to caregivers in order to encourage sound care and prevent additional abandonment.

TTL is aided in its work not only by the local community, but also by the Touching Tiny Lives Foundation. This organization, for which Fr. Theodore Hesburgh serves as honorary chair, will be hosting a luncheon on Wednesday, October 4, 2006 at the conclusion of the AFJN conference at Notre Dame. At the luncheon, both American and Basotho members of the TTL family will be present to tell the story of HIV/

AIDS in Mokhotlong and to describe both the work being done and the work left to do in Lesotho.

Please consider attending this luncheon to listen to the story of Touching Tiny Lives and to see the continuing struggle and growing success of Mokhotlong's orphaned children. For more information on attending the October luncheon, please email info@touchingtinylives.org.

Action Calendar

- **Save Darfur Rally at the U.N., September 17th**

Join the Save Darfur Coalition in New York City to call for U.N. peacekeeping troops to be deployed in Sudan's Darfur region, where a genocide has been taking place against the region's marginalized Black population for the last three years. Watch www.savedarfur.org for details.

- **AFJN Annual Conference, October 3-4th**

Join other AFJN members in gathering at the University of Notre Dame for this year's annual conference, themed "Africa's Children: Peril and Promise." Conference participants will hear an address from Archbishop John Baptist Odama of northern Uganda about the challenges facing children in war situations and from other distinguished speakers. See enclosed brochure or AFJN website (www.afjn.org) for details.

- **Northern Uganda Lobby Days, October 9th-10th**

AFJN is taking the lead in sponsoring northern Uganda-focused lobby days from October 9-10 in Washington, DC. Participants will be coming from across the U.S. for a symposium and lobby to learn about and advocate for peace in Uganda, where a twenty-year war has been waged on children. Watch the website for details.

- **Global GuluWalk, October 21st**

This year's second annual GuluWalk will take place in over 100 cities to raise the profile of the crisis in northern Uganda. Visit www.GuluWalk.com for details on how you can participate in your own city!

The Shifting Sands: *Parting Reflections from Fr. Bill Dyer*

About a year ago my name appeared in *Around Africa* in an article announcing the hiring of the new Executive Director of the Africa Faith and Justice Network. It was a time of hope and promise. Many of those hopes have been fulfilled and many of the promises accomplished, thanks to the team work of the AFJN staff, the active involvement of the AFJN Board and the faithful support and participation of the AFJN members. Only a year later, my name is appearing once again in *Around Africa*. This time it is in this article, which is announcing the departure of the Executive Director of AFJN! How quickly things change --- much like the shifting sands on the sunny shores of East Africa!

In February of this year, I was elected and appointed Assistant Provincial of the North American Province (Canada, Mexico and the United States) of the Missionaries of Africa. I have accepted that appointment, which takes effect on July 1, 2006.

This past year has been a busy one at AFJN. We started by moving our offices out of St. Paul's College and into Trinity University. Our website was recreated and our newsletter revamped. A survey was done of our membership and we were thus able to write our vision statement and to determine our action program. Conflict resolution was the focus sug-

gested by most members and so we took as our priority project the situation of conflict in northern Uganda. At the same time we were asked to participate in efforts being made with regard to other critical situations, namely those in Darfur, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The members insisted that we not forget such important issues as debt, trade, HIV/AIDS and good governance. Networking with many other advocacy organizations, we have tried to respond to the expectations of our members. At times those expectations seemed to be little more than dreams. But without dreams there would be no goals and no action!

I rejoice at having been part of the AFJN staff and I am confident that my successor (see article on p.6) will step up to the challenges ahead with the necessary creativity and perseverance. Since 1983, AFJN has sought to bring Africa to the attention both of the American public and of U.S. government officials. This has been done, is being done and will continue to be done with Africans and for Africans. The sands shift but the sea and the shore continue with the ebb and flow of their journey together!

AFJN's staff, board and members thank Fr. Bill for his strong leadership of AFJN during the past year and wish him the best in future endeavors!

Darfur Crisis and Advocacy Update

Negotiations around the Darfur Peace Agreement, thus far signed only by the Government of Sudan and a minority of the rebel groups in the region, continue as pressure builds on all parties to cease violence. While the U.S.-backed Agreement has been lauded by many in the international community, holdout rebel groups are arguing that basic grievances are not yet being addressed. Meanwhile, violence has actually increased since the Agreement was signed, and U.N. Envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, warned that negotiations are on the verge of total breakdown. Attacks against civilians continue from both rebel groups and Janjiweed militias, and spillover violence threatens stability in neighboring Chad.

At July's African Union (AU) Summit in Banjul, Gambia, AU leaders agreed to extend the mandate of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) protection forces until the end of 2006. The mission's mandate had been due to expire on September 30. Momentum to convert the AMIS forces into U.N. peacekeepers with greater numbers and resources has stalled, however, as the Government of Sudan continues to refuse access to U.N. troops. The AU Summit did not see African leaders coming to a consensus on the issue. Meanwhile, AU troops lack the capacity to

adequately protect civilians or to stop ongoing attacks.

In the U.S., grassroots and advocacy groups continue to request that President Bush appoint a Presidential Envoy to Sudan, as Robert Zoellick, Bush's former Deputy Secretary of State that worked on the issue, has resigned. Moreover, 179 members of the House sent a letter to President Bush yesterday, calling on him to immediately appoint a Special Envoy for Sudan. The letter notes that ongoing high level engagement by the U.S. government remains critical for efforts to secure a lasting peace in Darfur.

Finally, the Save Darfur Coalition has reached its goal of collecting one million postcards to send to President Bush urging him to support a stronger multinational protection force in Darfur. Senate Majority Leader Frist (TN) and Senator Clinton (NY) were present for the signing of the 1,000,000th postcard at a news conference on Capitol Hill.

Take Action!

Visit www.afjn.org, click on the Sudan campaign, and write a letter to your Members of Congress today!

AFJN Welcomes New Staff

In September, AFJN will be welcoming a new executive director in the person of Rev. Rocco Puopolo, a Xaverian Missionary. Originally from Norwood, Massachusetts, Rev. Puopolo was ordained in 1977 and has since ministered extensively in Sierra Leone, West Africa as well as in the US Midwest. During his twelve years in Sierra Leone he was involved in high school teaching, village evangelization and development, administration of diocesan schools as well as various youth chaplaincy responsibilities. In his final assignment in Sierra Leone he worked as director of the National Pastoral Center in Kenema.

In the United States, Rev. Puopolo has done both seminary training and advocacy work. Over the years he worked in Milwaukee and in Chicago where he later earned a Masters of Divinity in Cross Cultural Ministry from Catholic Theological Union. Rev. Puopolo served on the Board of the Federation of Returned Overseas Missions (From Mission to Mission), the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Mission Office Board and The Midwest Mission Task Force. He also took part in youth immersions such as the Reach Out Program of Milwaukee and the international Youth Peace Camp. While in Chicago he worked with Archdiocesan Muslim/Christian Dialogue groups as well as with the Archdiocesan CRS advisory Board.

Rev. Puopolo says that he welcomes the challenge and the honor to now direct AFJN and to continue its service to Africa.

Until Rev. Puopolo arrives in September, former AFJN

Board member Phil Reed will be acting as Interim Director. Phil worked in Washington from 2000-2005 in the Justice and Peace Office of the Missionaries of Africa. He spent four years in Burkina Faso both as a Peace Corps volunteer and as a missionary priest. Phil also worked for eight years in Niger and for two in the Philippines.

AFJN also has three new interns helping out in the office this summer. Beth Tuckey is a senior at Kenyon College in Ohio where she is pursuing a B.A. in International Studies. Within this degree, she focuses specifically on political science and African area studies. Beth comes to AFJN from a semester-abroad in Uganda with the School for International Training (SIT) where she took classes and did field research on primary school feeding programs. As an intern, she will work on the northern Uganda advocacy campaign and will carry out research on food security.



Moses, Beth, and Meghan are AFJN's new interns.

Moses Ochola is currently a student at North Carolina A&T State University where he is majoring in International Studies. While at AFJN, Moses hopes to gain knowledge on issues pertaining to U.S. trade relations with Africa, and is conducting research on small arms proliferation and the African Growth and Opportunities Act. Moses intends to use his experience here at AFJN next semester as he prepares to study abroad in Africa.

Meghan Battle attends Boston College but arrived in DC via Swaziland, where she did the first part of her internship teaching English in an orphanage and developing curriculum. She will be a sophomore in the fall majoring in Theology and Human Development with a minor in International Studies. She has a senior's experience as far as work and community involvement are concerned. Amongst her many volunteer experiences, Meghan got involved with Invisible Children, which led her to AFJN.

During their time at AFJN, the interns will have the chance to explore issues of interest to them, sharing with us the results of their research. They will also be giving a hand to the staff in the preparations for the upcoming annual meeting and lobby days. The staff welcomes their energy and their eagerness to learn and to help.

Legislative Watch

- **The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act (S.2125)** passed the Senate unanimously on June 29th! There is currently no companion bill in the House, so please call your Representatives in the House and request that they introduce and pass the bill as soon as possible.
- **The Jubilee Act (H.R. 1130)** currently has 81 cosponsors in the House. The bill would provide much more significant debt cancellation for poor countries than was accomplished during last year's G8 Summit. Visit www.jubileeusa.org for details.

AFJN Happenings in Brief...

Conferences/Workshops:

- Great Lakes Forum: “Cross-Border Conflict in the Great Lakes: Regional Problems Demand Regional Solutions.”
- Bill Sutherland Institute: “The Challenge of Creating People-Centered Economies in Africa”
- Transformation Resource Center and International Rivers Network on Large Scale Dam Development in Lesotho
- Global Health Council: The Youth Bulge: Risks of Civil Conflict
- Sojourner’s Pentecost 2006 Conference
- AGOA Civil Society Forum at GW University
- More, Better, and Effective Aid: The New European Aid Effectiveness Package at Center for Global Development
- US Institute of Peace: Peace Processes in Darfur and Northern Uganda

Sign-on Letters:

- Urgent call for U.S. Initiative on Health Workforce in AIDS-Impacted Countries
- To Senate Foreign Ops for Global HIV/AIDS funds
- Call for appointment of Presidential Envoy to Darfur

Briefings:

- Country Desk Officer Madeline Seidenstricker on the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Child Soldiers briefing of the House Africa Subcommittee

AFJN Events:

- Special Forum with Congolese Congress of America on prospects for peaceful transition in the D.R. Congo

Meetings:

- With Senators Inhofe, Brownback and Coleman, and Representatives Payne and Smith for northern Uganda
- With Capt. Bob Wells, Adviser to Vice President Cheney on Africa for northern Uganda
- With Dr. Cindy Courville, National Security Adviser on Africa regarding northern Uganda
- With staff of Senators Feingold, Coleman and Martinez regarding northern Uganda
- With Ugandan Ambassador regarding northern Uganda
- With several Senate and Congressional Offices to Lobby for Jubilee Act (100% Debt Cancellation)
- ADNA & Catholic Task Force on Africa
- With Bishop Ssekemanya, Chair of the Ugandan Episcopal Conference
- Faith-Based working group on Health Care Worker Initiative for AIDS Impacted Countries

Rallies/Demonstrations

- Uganda-CAN’s 8,744 signatures delivered to key representatives, White House and Assistant Sec. State for African Affairs
- Africa Action Darfur demonstration

Africa Faith and Justice Network is a Catholic network of individual and group members focused on Africa and the experience of its people. AFJN is committed in faith to collaborate in the task of transforming United States mentality and policy on Africa. It seeks to be an instrument of education and advocacy on behalf of justice for Africa.

Staff:
 Phil Reed
 Michael Poffenberger
 Lacey Haussamen

© Africa Faith and Justice Network, Inc. ISSN 1093-4820. Materials in Around Africa are copyrighted and may be used provided AFJN is given credit.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Contributing Member \$50 _____ Organizational member \$1,000 _____

Return to AFJN, 3035 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017
 Ph. (202) 884-9780 Fax: 202-884-9774 email: afjn@afjn.org
<http://www.afjn.org>

Advocacy for justice and peace in Africa doesn’t just happen. AFJN needs your help and participation! Thank you for your financial support.



Check Out AFJN's New Website

Now at afjn.org you can:

- Donate and pay membership dues online
- Write Congress directly from our website
- Read daily updates with news, reflection, and alerts
- Join the AFJN eNetwork for regular e-mail communication

Sign up today for AFJN's e-mail network at afjn.org/enetwork.html!