



Declaration of Commitment

by a Network of Faith Based Organisations
For a Better Response to HIV and AIDS in Trinidad & Tobago,
issued on the 10th of December, 2012

PREAMBLE

We, the Leaders and Representatives of Faith Based Organisations (Christian, Hindu, Muslim) from a series of symposia, *Building A Network of FBOs for a Better Response to HIV and AIDS*, held on December 14 2011, October 22, November 23, and December 10, 2012, hereby affirm this

DECLARATION

WHEREAS, the Faith-Based Leaders of Trinidad and Tobago acknowledge the magnitude of the HIV and AIDS challenge and its heavy emotional, financial, social and physical impact on the lives of many children, adults, families and communities, including communities of faith – a negative impact that can be alleviated by education, compassion and a refusal to tolerate stigma or discrimination against persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS;

WHEREAS, the Faith-Based Organisations of Trinidad and Tobago share common core values of spiritual enlightenment, sound mental health, protection of the body, spiritual sustenance, inherent value of life, stable life-affirming family relationships with parents as primary educators of their children, delay of sexual initiation until marriage, marital fidelity, care of suffering persons, human worth and dignity that calls for equal access to care – values that empower and bring hope when taught in the context of effective family life education, and recovery education in a spirit of love and forgiveness;

WHEREAS, the Faith-Based Leaders of Trinidad and Tobago formally recognise our moral and civic responsibility to provide a proactive voice on the country's HIV epidemic as well as leadership by example in the areas of prevention, care, support, counseling, and advocacy that affirms the dignity of the person;

WHEREAS, Together We Note with Hope the potential of treatment advancements in tandem with care and support to drastically reduce new infections and help people living with HIV to lead healthy and productive lives – we therefore pledge to equip and mobilise our faith communities to reduce the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Trinidad and Tobago as we move toward zero new infections, zero stigma and discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths, as we transform our faith communities into safe spaces and sanctuaries for all people and as we become consistent in empowering our people to lead by example in making wise choices towards healthy, caring and productive lives for the sake of future generations. In this we trust in God, in whom nothing is impossible.

WE THEREFORE COMMIT OURSELVES TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE AND MOBILISE OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES:

TO REDUCE NEW HIV INFECTIONS

- We will consistently promote purity and respect in thought and conduct, delay of sexual initiation until marriage, risk avoidant behaviour, and fidelity in marriage, while seeking to improve our competencies in effective family life education in our homes, our schools and our faith communities.
- We will empower parents to be effective primary educators of their children especially in the area of age-appropriate, healthy, and responsible sexual development and sexuality.
- We will proactively get involved in age appropriate, risk avoidance prevention education for school age children and teens by providing qualified, trained resource persons and educators from our faith communities to partner with the Ministry of Education in its prevention efforts.
- We will intentionally involve our youth alongside us in the care of persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in our communities.
- We will take the lead by being tested for HIV and sensitively encourage voluntary HIV testing with counseling for everyone, and in particular: those preparing for marriage, expectant mothers, significant others of those infected with HIV and the most vulnerable persons.

TO REDUCE AIDS-RELATED DEATHS

- We will sensitively reach out to persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in our faith groups and communities to extend compassionate help and the love of God to them in an empathic way that upholds their privacy and dignity and connects them with support groups.
- We will provide meaningful support for persons living with HIV and to families affected by HIV and AIDS in the form of assistance in meeting basic needs, in accessing medical care and other resources, training and empowerment for continued employment, in holistic development, spiritual sustenance, end of life emotional support for persons with AIDS and their caregivers, providing dignified final rites, and the compassionate care of orphans and the widowed.
- We will include persons living with HIV in providing ongoing education and referral for persons infected and affected with HIV as an effective form of support and to encourage compliance and adherence to medication and other life habits that enable healthy productive living.

TO ELIMINATE STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION

- We will ensure that our faith communities are welcoming sanctuaries for all people, including persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.
- We will ensure that we consistently educate ourselves and our followers regarding the facts about HIV and AIDS, and that we learn caring, accurate and sensitive language when speaking about the epidemic in order to reduce stigma and discrimination resulting from a lack of knowledge.
- We will organise community outreach efforts that promote overall physical health, encourage voluntary HIV testing and provide counseling, not in isolation, but as part of a wide range of health services offered.
- We will seek justice for all, speaking out respectfully but firmly against practices and policies that discriminate against persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in our homes, faith groups, schools, places of employment and communities.

