

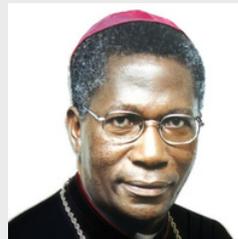
Inter-Religious Council of Uganda

 Religions for Peace

PRESS RELEASE

01 December, 2022

World AIDS Day



**"ENDING INEQUALITIES AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS,
YOUNG WOMEN AND BOYS"**

**INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA
STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION TO
COMMEMORATE THE WORLD AIDS DAY**

Supported by the
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS



Fellow Ugandans,

Today December 1, 2022, we join the government of Uganda and the rest of the world to commemorate World AIDS Day under the theme, **"ENDING INEQUALITIES AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN, AND BOYS"**. This day gives us an opportunity to pause and reflect on the lives lost to HIV/AIDS; how far we have come in the fight against this virus; and what we need to do to ensure an AIDS-free future generation. We also take this day to raise awareness and recommit to a faithful and dedicated response.

As religious leaders, we want to remind Ugandans that this World AIDS Day is marked while we are still under the threat of the Ebola epidemic in our country which, if not adequately addressed, has the potential to exacerbate gaping economic inequalities that may affect access to education, healthcare and affect quality of life through stunted livelihoods. Similarly, let us also not forget the intersectionality of gender-based violence and HIV spread, as World AIDS Day falls within the 16 Days of Activism against GBV. Gender-based violence, which affects all genders, further exacerbates vulnerabilities that increase the risk of infection to HIV.

To date, while the world has the means to overcome HIV/AIDS, structural inequalities continue to make it difficult for proven solutions for prevention and treatment from being effectively implemented. This year's theme recognizes and reminds us that there are inequalities in the way we are responding to AIDS. This calls for all of us to work towards ending these inequalities because they are a threat to human and ecological life and well-being.

Viewed from the perspective of HIV/AIDS, we have learnt that inequalities take social, economic, and structural forms. Therefore, we take note that persistent inequalities between adolescent girls, young women, and boys can significantly weaken efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and increase vulnerability. We, therefore, call upon all stakeholders to address the social and systemic discrimination that is entrenched in almost all our societal structures. We believe that discrimination denies those living with HIV a fair chance in life, as they perpetually struggle with a combination of shame, blame, isolation, rejection, and the fear of death.

Fellow Ugandans, one of the primary tenets of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda is the recognition of fair access to the goods of the earth and provision for the basic needs of all, including health for the Uganda we want. Therefore, every person, whether adolescent girls, young women and boys in rural or urban settings, should have access to prevention, treatment, care, and support, irrespective of their gender, race or religion. We cannot talk of mercy, compassion, and social justice when there are millions of people living with AIDS in the world, of which the majority of women, men and children are almost forgotten and face inequality in treatment, access to medical care, and dignified existence. We, therefore, call for a just world that practices equality without leaving anyone behind.

Over the last two decades, we, the religious leaders under the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, have strengthened our mission to accompany those infected and affected by HIV through an integrated holistic approach to AIDS, in order to eliminate the economic and social inequalities that they face in all spheres of life.

We strongly believe that ending AIDS as a public health threat is not just about medical care, but ensuring that we look at those infected and affected holistically. How will their lives be lived if they cannot find employment while they are adjusting to medications? If they cannot have access to health and social care?"

Therefore, while inequalities continue to contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS, we call upon the government and partners to eliminate financial and other barriers to health care and increase investment in order to achieve universal health care coverage for everyone, everywhere. This will consequently ensure equal access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care for all.

In conclusion, we appeal to all leaders, women, and men of goodwill in positions of leadership – whether government, civil society organizations, and religious leaders – to work together to defeat the enemies of human life, including HIV/AIDS and other vexing diseases. This includes tuberculosis and the Ebola virus disease, and many other forms of inequalities that threaten life, such as injustice, gender-based violence and child abuse. Keen to promote the central role of positive faith in action to end AIDS as a public health threat, we commit to urgently take significant and sustained actions by addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination, inequalities and build bridges of collaboration among different faiths as well as between faith and non-faith actors.

We call upon all partners, leaders, men, and women to boldly recognize and address the inequalities which are holding back our progress in ending AIDS as a public health threat. There is need to ensure equal access to essential HIV and AIDS services, particularly for adolescent girls, women, and boys, striving for the highest possible standard of health for all people and giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health, based on social conditions.

If we become complacent in our response, the HIV and AIDS pandemic will win the race. However, we cannot let that happen. We have got to finish the race and to do so, we have got to “fast track” our efforts now. We must face the reality that AIDS is not over and know that if we work together, we can end AIDS as a public health threat.

Finally, we pray for those living with or affected by HIV and for their loved ones. We pray to receive strength and courage to fight injustice, inequalities and stigma, and discrimination within our faith communities.

For God and My Country!

Issued this 01 st day of December 2022

The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu
Archbishop Church of Uganda,
Chairperson, Council of Presidents

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA