



WORLD AIDS DAY MESSAGE FROM THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA TO THE NATION

Theme: "Let Communities Lead"

Dear brothers and Sisters,

We greet you in the name of the Almighty God.

Inter Religious Council of Uganda is a national organization that brings together religious leaders and faith communities to address issues of common concern including HIV/AIDS. In our dedication to promoting a healthy nation, we recognize HIV/AIDS as a significant threat to human well-being in our country. As a faith community, we cannot allow this World AIDS Day come and go routinely, as if its business as usual.

WORLD AIDS DAY (WAD):

For the past 34 years every 1st December of each year the world has been commemorating the “World AIDS Day” (WAD). And the aim of the WAD commemoration is to unite all people in the fight against HIV and AIDS, to shine a light on the real experience of people living with HIV and to give an opportunity for people to show their support for people living with HIV as well as to remember those who have died due to AIDS.

WHY COMMUNITIES NEED TO LEAD IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV AND AIDS:

In many communities, HIV is a generalized epidemic largely spread by sexual intercourse and affecting sexually active men and women alike, with many children becoming infected during pregnancy, birth or via breast milk.

Despite all the interventions, many of our people do not know the facts about how to protect themselves and others. Stigma and discrimination remain a reality for many people living with the condition.

Important to note that majority of the men still have poor health seeking behaviors, not testing, not enrolling in care and those enrolled are not adhering to medication. All this is happening in the communities we live in.

Important also to note that most of the new infections are among the adolescent girls and young women. This calls for the girls and young women to be more vigilant in preventive measures.

All this happens in our communities we live in which makes it key for communities to lead the fight against HIV and AIDS.

With such community-wide risks and rates of infection, we as religious leaders have a role to play.

OUR MESSAGE AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS;

- ✚ Together as a community, we can fight HIV and AIDS.
- ✚ We remind you that HIV still exists; it can be prevented through Abstinence and Faithfulness
- ✚ Avoid alcohol and drug abuse as these impair your judgement which actions may lead you to risky sexual behavior. Remember that HIV is mainly spread through unsafe sex.

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- ✚ Carry out regular HIV testing for you and your partner. Testing is the only way to know your HIV status. Your partner's HIV status is not yours. Please note that healthy-looking people could have HIV.
 - ✚ Treatment for HIV is available. once you test HIV positive go to the nearest Health facility for life long ARVs. You can lead a productive life if you adhere to treatment as directed by a health practioner.
 - ✚ You won't get HIV by touching, sharing utensils or mosquito bites. People living with HIV are our brothers and sisters, and we should relate with them as such by providing them with the necessary care and support which they badly need to live a healthy, productive and meaningful life
 - ✚ For parents, you have a great role to play; spend quality time with your children, set an example for them to follow, understand and discuss the unique needs of young people such as body changes and attraction to the opposite sex. Create an enabling environment at home for your children to freely discuss body changes and HIV.

Backed by our scriptures from the Bible and Quran;

Ephesians 5:15-17: *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*

Al-Maidah 5.35: *O you who believe! be careful of (your duty to) Allah and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may be successful.*