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Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Religious Leaders Support Ghana's HIV/AIDS Campaign Against Stigma

RELIGIOUS LEADERS HAVE EMBRACED GHANA'S national program encouraging compassion and support for people living with HIV/AIDS. In an historic communiqué presented to Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama, 23 Muslim and 25 Christian religious leaders committed themselves to work alongside the government and other stakeholders in a united front in the war against HIV/AIDS. "Reach Out, Show Compassion" for people living with HIV/AIDS is the second phase of the high profile "Stop AIDS Love Life" multimedia communication campaign that has been running since February 2000.

With the cooperation of Muslim and Christian leaders in Ghana, the new campaign aims to increase the number of religious organizations, congregations, and humanitarian groups advocating for and engaged in care and compassion activities in communities. The Christian Council of Ghana is coordinating the religious groups in implementing the campaign. Training for 900 clergy, imams, and other religious leaders is being organized and conducted throughout the country to establish compassion and support programs. Television and radio spots also incorporate quotes directly from the Bible or the Koran that demonstrate compassionate behavior.

In Ghana, where approximately half a million people are living with the virus that causes AIDS, the U.S. Agency for International Development is supporting efforts to raise awareness and increase safe sexual behavior by promoting the "ABCs"—**A**bstain, **B**e faithful to one partner, or use a **C**ondom. The AIDS prevention campaign is a joint effort of the Ghana Ministries of Information and Health, the Ghana Social Marketing Foundation, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs.

The prevention campaign has shattered the silence about AIDS in families and communities across Ghana, reaching more than 90 percent of the population. "ABC" messages have been woven into dramatic scripts for video, television, and radio spots. Popular personalities with young audience appeal deliver these practical, lifesaving messages about "how to say no," that "it's OK to wait," and "if you're going to have sex, use a condom." Other approaches feature positive role models in situations that help young people learn assertiveness and negotiation skills when they are confronted with sexual advances or feel pressured to have sex. Bringing much needed attention to the stigma surrounding AIDS, the campaign is airing testimonials from people living with AIDS and has opened the subject up to public discussion for the first time in Ghana.

"Let us all go from here with the singular resolve of showing compassion to all persons living with HIV and AIDS and their families, and supporting each other to adopt appropriate safe behaviors that will lead us to win the fight against HIV/AIDS."

—Alhaji Aliu Mahama,
Vice President of the Republic of Ghana

Ghana, May 2003

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