



FWCC 22nd Triennial
August, 2007, Dublin, Ireland

Report of the Working Group on HIV/AIDS

The HIV&AIDS Working Group at the FWCC Triennial August 11-19, 2007 expresses deep concern over the statistics reported on HIV/AIDS throughout the world, and particularly in the Africa Section. 39.5 million people in the world are known to be living with HIV. 2 million of these are children and 1 child under 15 dies of AIDS-related illness every minute of every day. There are 12 million orphans.

We have heard 4 reports from work with problems of HIV&AIDS in 4 countries, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Congo, and one testimony of a Friend living with HIV. Comprehensive programs are being established in all of these countries for defeating stigma, for prevention, testing, treatment, and alleviation of the consequences of HIV infection. These programs need the attention and support of FWCC in cooperation with other faiths, ecumenical movements, secular groups and governments. In theology and practice, religious faith is hugely relevant to the global AIDS crisis. Although Quakers comprise only a small proportion of people of faith worldwide, we have a particular calling to respond to the AIDS pandemic. The interaction between our faith and practice is compelling, direct, and an issue of social justice. In terms of Quaker testimonies, AIDS challenges the way we live our lives in relation to truth and integrity, equality and community, simplicity, peace and (as HIV and AIDS contributes to worsening conflict, poverty and environmental degradation) even to the Earth and environment.

Truth: One of the greatest obstacles to dealing effectively with HIV is denial of its reality at the level of the individual, the local community, the nation and the international community. Only when we move beyond denial to acceptance of HIV as something that affects us all can we begin to mitigate its effects and slow down its spread.

Equality: AIDS is a health problem that is both preventable and manageable. Yet the global AIDS pandemic affects people in a highly unequal way. 70% of 39.5 million people living with HIV are in sub-Saharan Africa, where their incomes are only a small fraction of those in the economically developed world. People on low incomes are less likely to be informed about the causes of HIV transmission, and to be able to protect themselves from infection. Once infected with HIV, they cannot afford the drugs and nutritious food which can give them quality of life. African women are particularly disadvantaged by AIDS.

Peace: Throughout the world, AIDS is a major cause of distrust, disharmony and conflict. It robs people of hope and a sense of meaning in life. AIDS-related stigma and discrimination divide couples and families, communities and nations, churches and other faith communities. AIDS breeds misconceptions, violence, and more orphans than our world has ever known. AIDS sows the seeds of poverty, which in turn undermines the prospects of young people for a decent education, and for a healthy and secure future. No other health issue has had such a destabilising impact upon whole societies.

Community: The innate strengths of communities are the greatest potential power for responding effectively to the global AIDS epidemic. In the West, the gay men's community took the lead in addressing issues such as safer sex and access to HIV treatments. In sub-Saharan Africa, churches and other faith communities have pioneered new forms of home-based care for people living with HIV and of support for orphans. Faith communities have been less effective, however, in addressing some of the underlying causes of HIV transmission, such as the shame, stigma, denial and discrimination attached to HIV and AIDS.

For the Friends churches to lead in education and understanding for defeating stigma and discrimination:

We recommend that Friends acknowledge that the AIDS epidemic is a world calamity and can be a barrier to peace and development.

We recommend that Friends promote open education and discussion on issues related to sexuality, gender-based violence and intravenous drug use.

We recommend that Friends promote greater involvement of people living with HIV in churches' response to the epidemic and to adopt inclusive workplace policies for people living with HIV.

We propose that FWCC establish an Advocacy Committee to:

- Identify all activities started by Friends around the world;
- Establish a connection between the Advocacy Committee and FWCC;
- Sensitise all sections of FWCC to have a same message of hope in response of HIV and AIDS.

Members of the working group are willing to serve on this Committee with Fidel Nsengiyumva from Rwanda YM and Connie Archbald from Northern YM as co-clerks, and Linn Mo from Norway YM as Secretary.

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Report of the Working Group on Violence

Friends worldwide are profoundly troubled by the widespread acceptance of a pervasive culture of violence as the norm everywhere.

We urge Friends, both individually and corporately, to re-focus, in worship and action, on addressing personal, collective and structural violence. Our peace testimony challenges us to speak truth to power, to seek justice, and to take away the occasion for all forms of violence.

We must re-affirm and promote the preservation of and respect for the dignity of all life.

“Let us then try what Love will do” William Penn.



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Report of the Working Group on Civil Liberties and Human Rights

The Working Group met to respond to concerns submitted by the Asia- West Pacific Section, Australia YM, Hong Kong MM, Indiana YM, Ohio Valley YM, New England YM, Bogota MM, and Britain YM.

We shared common concerns regarding:

- Protection of civil liberties
- Effects of racism and related intolerances
- Rights of minorities, first nations, stateless persons, refugees and migrants
- Erosion of laws upholding human rights
- The tendency to consider some people of less worth than others, whereas all are created equal
- Ways of moving forward for the benefit of all humanity
- The indissoluble connection between the environment and human rights

and

We were reminded that the Quaker United Nations Office is a valuable resource for Friends' action and information (www.quno.org).

Due to the variety of concerns, we broke into four separate groups, considering the issues of sovereignty for indigenous peoples, racism, civil liberties, and modern day slavery.

Sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples Sub-Group Report

The report of this subgroup was submitted to a plenary session of the 22nd FWCC Triennial as a Minute of the whole and was adopted at Session #7 on Saturday, 18 August 2007.

Civil Liberties Sub-Group Report

We agreed that the following words be recorded:

In the reality of the call of Jesus to love our neighbours as ourselves and the parable of the Good Samaritan explaining that our neighbour is every human being, we invite Friends to consider if there are any fellow human beings whom your government or any other government or group is not treating as you would want to be treated yourself.

And we refer to Hebrews 13.3: “Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.”

Friends uphold the sacredness of life, along with Testimonies on Integrity, Love, Peace and Justice, recognizing that the world is faced with natural and human-made threats that threaten our very survival and that speaking to our Testimonies now is more important than ever.

We recall the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. “

We know that Friends in different situations will need to respond in different ways. We need to support and uphold one another, in prayer and in other ways as they open. See Galatians 6.2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”

We call on individual Friends and Friends Meetings and Churches to consider how we can all speak to, act on and bear witness to our Testimonies and spiritual insights to uphold human rights and the equal worth of all people, being particularly mindful of the concern expressed by Friends from the United States of America regarding the erosion of civil liberties in that country. We also call on Friends, peoples of the world, and national governments to act to protect the environment by working cooperatively together for the common good of all.

Racism Sub-Group Report

(1) We ask the Central Executive Committee of FWCC to send an ethnically balanced delegation to the 2009 Durban Review Conference on Racism.

(2) We encourage Yearly Meetings around the world to examine and research how the discriminations and privileges associated with racism and related intolerances such as those fostered by caste systems and the effects of colonization are being experienced in our societies, both Quaker and beyond. These analyses would support the FWCC delegation’s representatives at the Durban Review Conference and Friends themselves as we grapple with racism and race-based privilege as individuals and as a Society.

(3) We ask that the 2003 Minute on Racism submitted by New England Yearly Meeting be circulated among Friends worldwide, to which end it is printed below:

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends affirms its commitment to becoming an open, affirming, anti-racist Religious Society. Our understanding of racism is that it is a system that accords advantage or disadvantage based on racial identity. Racism is fundamentally inconsistent with the divine guidance that has led our Religious Society to testimonies such as Equality, Peace and Community. We seek divine assistance and the help of other friends of Truth to examine our individual and corporate complicity in racism. We aspire to a more perfect union with the Author of all, who shows no partiality in the diversity of creation. Those of us who have grown up with a white identity in America have a particular challenge in that we have been conditioned not to notice the system of racism and white privilege. Our well-intentioned attempts at color blindness can have the unfortunate result of blinding us to the system of racism in which we unwittingly participate. Let us remember Jesus’ admonition to remove the log from our own eye before seeking to remove

a speck from our brother's or sister's eye. We all pray for clarity of vision so that, in the words of George Fox, we may "be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing and make the witness of God in them to bless you." We continue to grapple with understanding of how we contribute to and perpetuate white privilege, as individuals, as a Religious Society and as Americans.

Modern Day Slavery Sub-Group Report

Modern day slavery takes many forms in different parts of the world, including the following:

(a) Prostitution: Girls and boys have been taken from their homes to big towns in the country itself or from the country to abroad, where they have been hired and kept in brothels for prostitution. The hirer organizes everything for the clients and arranges the fees. The girls and boys have no say.

(b) Employment in homes, industries, and offices: Employees sometimes have no work guidelines, no salary structures - in short, they have no rights at all. Because of the shortage of jobs, they continue to work even with little pay and dare not risk protesting for fear of being sacked. Many owe money to their employers and have no way to pay it back.

(c) Family: Children in many countries are at the mercy of parents who may choose whether to take them to school or not; they may be sent anywhere, any time, and be punished anyhow. They have no freedom in their own homes. Similarly, women may be oppressed by their husbands and have no voice in running their homes even though they do all or most of the work there. Also, some men may be mishandled by their wives; for example, the wives may choose not to give their husbands food or even beat them if they make noise.

(d) Schools and learning institutions: Students are often at the mercy of the headmasters and other teachers; they may be punished without having a chance to explain, for instance, why they have arrived late. Teachers may also be suppressed by the head teachers and even abused in the presence of students. Finally, teachers may sexually abuse their students.

What is the solution?

We urge local communities to provide safe places where modern day slaves can go to escape their situation. We encourage local Friends through their Meetings and Churches to offer pastoral care and visitation in the homes of troubled families. Where possible, we ask Friends in the affected communities to take up the matter with the local authorities. Increasing awareness can act to reduce these practices.

Submitted by the Working Group Co-Clerks,

Rosemary Coffey and Churchill Kibisu



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Report of the Working Group on Environment & Sustainability

We believe it is vital to address the threat to life on Earth posed by environmental destruction.

We believe that we have a duty of responsible stewardship for all of God's creation, although we recognize that we do not always achieve it fully. When we damage the natural world and its creatures, we damage God's creation. Reverence for human life cannot be separated from maintaining the integrity and health of the ecology of our planet.

Competition for land, water and other precious resources is leading to wars and ecological disasters. Overuse and misuse of resources is not sustainable.

We call upon all the peoples and governments of the world to recognize the equal worth of all people, the integral worth of the natural world and to work together for the common good of all the earth community.

With God's help, we resolve to examine our lives in light of the needs of the whole Earth and cooperate in taking steps towards sustainable living for all.



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Report of the Working Group on Outreach & Growth

We have considered why we as Quakers want to do outreach. Our motivation is to share the deep joy of our experience of the Divine. In so doing, we can speak to the condition of the world, answering some of the spiritual hunger and hurt we see there.

We have looked at practical ways in which we encounter others within and beyond the Society of Friends. We have heard of Meetings enriched by contacts with other Friends' groups, and the growth in understanding from dialogue with other faiths. We have heard how websites increase our visibility to seekers and how face-to-face contact with enquirers continues to be fruitful. We have been reminded that knowing ourselves better through inreach is an integral part of preparing for outreach. Without it, we might ask (as did Sweden Yearly Meeting): "When all these people come to us, what will they find?". We hope they will find a people who are "patterns and examples..... answering that of God in every one." This is a form of prophetic witness, a countersign to the prevailing culture wherever we live.

Can our lives, words and actions embody the love and truth that we have found? Can they speak to others whom we invite to experience the power of the Living God? For some this experience is inseparable from the encounter with Jesus Christ. For all of us, at the core is the direct access to the Living God, as declared by George Fox. How much are we still burning to proclaim the vision of our founder?

2.

Our working group has been enriched by the opportunity to listen in love to the expressions of belief from different Quaker traditions. We commend to Friends everywhere the thought that our own understanding can be strengthened by reconnecting with our roots in early Quakerism and by encountering our present day diversity.

We call Friends to rise to the challenge of these queries:

Is your living faith constantly renewed?
Can you find new words to convey our message to today's world?
What drives you to do outreach?
What outreach will you do?

We remind Friends that the prophetic voice is not always comfortable.

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Report of the Working Group on Young Friends

The Young Friends Working Group met twice. We heard concerns from two Yearly Meetings (Australia and Baltimore) and the Young Quaker Christian Association from the Africa section. We broke into small groups and shared about what we think the key issues are to do with Young Friends.

There were many concerns raised in addition to those presented by the Yearly Meetings. Our discussion was primarily focused around the decline in attendance of university-aged people that many meetings experience and how to reverse this trend. We recognised that we need to be supporting young people of all ages, not just those of university age. A number of other areas of concern less commonly addressed by meetings were also raised in this working group. These concerns have been presented in the form of queries that are attached to this report.

In our second meeting we shared around the query: What are the success stories? What are we doing well that we can share with other monthly meetings and yearly meetings? We often lament the lack of young people, and forget about the good work that is being done. This working group was an uplifting opportunity to learn from each other and celebrate what is already being done to support and attract young people in our meetings. Some of the ideas from the second session are attached to this report.

Queries

- What might effective, friendly outreach to young people look like?
- What is it about Quakerism that is attractive to young people? Are we willing to consider adapting some of our ways (eg style of worship, business, education, pastoral care, ministry) with the hope of reaching Young Friends?
- What are the success stories? What are we doing well that we can share with other monthly meetings and Yearly Meetings?
- Do we provide settings for intergenerational interactions, formal and informal? How can we encourage older friends and younger friends to engage with and learn from each other?
- What are our expectations of Young Friends and how do we express these? What do we assume? How do we support Young Friends and help them to 'season'?
- What are the prophetic messages offered to us by Young Friends and their gatherings? Are we truly prepared to listen to them

Responses to the following query: What are the success stories? What are we doing well that we can share with other monthly meetings and Yearly Meetings?

- High Schoolers organise their own conferences, so have more control over what they do and when
- Adapting worship to meet the needs of youth. Having some worship planned entirely by young people.
- Holding regular Young Friends conferences/activities during the year
- Having a strong group of Young Friends keeps people coming back to continue being part of that community
- Having Young Friends on committees, some Yearly Meetings have 2 places on each Yearly Meeting committee for Young Friends
- Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting, all people under the age of 18 attend Yearly Meeting free of charge
- ‘truth speak’, teens set a scenario, eg teenage daughter gets pregnant, then invite adults and teens to talk about this issue and how they would all feel if it happened. People are divided into small groups, no parent is in the same group as their teen.
- Sharing through the arts, not just through words
- Sharing through telling our own stories
- Intergenerational activities organised by Young Friends; one example was a Scavenger Hunt at Yearly Meeting that everyone participated in.
- Joint service projects, especially manual labour as community building activity between Friends and with other groups, eg migrant workers
- It is important to let people come in and out of the meeting community as they need in their young adult lives, and to be supportive of this process
- Encourage leadership in Young Friends of all ages, so that when the older people move on, they don’t take all the knowledge and leadership with them.
- Make sure that youth and adults who want to interact are not inhibited by the timing of their programs, especially for the older teens who are looking ahead
- Exchange programs between Young Friends in different Yearly Meetings
- People are very segregated by age in general society, and that is also into religions. We need to be aware of that and be deliberate about overcoming it so that we are not ‘old Quakers’ and ‘young Quakers’, but we are all Quakers!
- FGC Youth Ministries committee developed after consultation with high schoolers and Young Friends; high school and Young Adult Friends program at summer gathering; published ‘Whispers of Faith’ by Young Friends; website (www.quakeryouth.org)

Quaker schools and camps are important places of outreach. Often very few Quakers attend, but the values of Friends are taught to the young people, who live them at school/camp and carry them into their homes, modelling them to their parents who often start attending Meeting themselves. Many people who went to Quaker schools consider themselves Quaker but have never attached themselves to a meeting, they often return, but much later in life.