

Caritas Internationalis:
Promoting Greater Access to PMTCT and
Early Testing and Treatment of Children with HIV
or HIV/TB Co-infection

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I am very pleased to share with you the news about Caritas' global campaign, which is called "HAART FOR Children: Greater Access to Pediatric HIV and TB testing and treatment" and was launched on International Women's Day, 08 March 2009.

The Campaign aims to urge governments and pharmaceutical companies to develop the testing and treatment – both for HIV and TB - that could save the lives of the 800 children who die each day either from from AIDS related illnesses or from HIV/TB co-infection. The Campaign also is designed to advocate with governments to engage in further scale-up of programmes for the prevention of transmission of HIV from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, at the time of birth, and through breastfeeding. Such transmission is almost entirely preventable through interventions that are very inexpensive and easy to administer – but only small percentage of pregnant women living with HIV are provided access to these interventions.

These are the goals for Caritas' "HAART FOR CHILDREN" Campaign

- 1.The scale up of Programmes to prevent Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV;
- 2.To increase access and development of pediatric diagnostic tests both for HIV and TB;
- 3.To increase access and development of pediatric treatment for HIV and TB/HIV co-infection

The main targets for this Campaign are governments and pharmaceutical companies, but we also need to encourage universities and private research institutes to increase research on these urgent topics.

Access to medicines is a fundamental element of the child's right to health under article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child:

“States must ensure that children have sustained and non-discriminatory access to comprehensive treatment and care, including necessary HIV-related drugs, goods and services. In particular, States should negotiate with the pharmaceutical industry to make the necessary medicines locally available at the lowest costs possible .”

With respect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Caritas wants political leaders to account to the children of the world on how their governments have promoted and respected the child’s right to health. We need to keep the pressure up so that all children living with HIV can access the life saving treatment that they deserve.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognize that other stakeholders, including pharmaceutical companies, should share this responsibility. The United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights also confirmed that, while governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the right to health, pharmaceutical companies can exert a profound impact on the realization of this right. Moreover, pharmaceutical companies often set the prices of diagnostic equipment and materials for detecting HIV in children and of paediatric ARV medicines at an unaffordable level. When they set such high prices, when they do not invest in research and development of much needed medications to treat HIV in children, and when they lobby for legal standards that limit access to medicines for HIV-positive people, these companies are obstructing the ability of States to respect, protect and fulfill the right to health.

Caritas collaborates with United Nations (UN) Specialized Agencies, with UN Human Rights mechanisms, and with other interested organizations in this campaign to prevent further loss of these children and to scale up efforts to prevent the transmission of HIV from a HIV-infected mother to her child. Caritas will undertake is promoting the child’s right to health together with CHAN (the Catholic HIV and AIDS Network), and with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA). Since pharmaceutical companies have a key role to play in improving access to medicines for women and children living with HIV, Caritas is engaged in regular dialogue with IFPMA, the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufactures & Associations.

Caritas suggests various ways to promote the activities of the Campaign.

The Campaign includes a Children’s Letter-Writing component. We have collected more than 600 letters coming from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, North America, and Oceania.

These children live in a shelter for mothers and children living with or affected by HIV that is operated by the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City. I have visited this Centre on several occasions and held some of these very same children when their little bodies were burning with fever and their death was expected imminently. Now, as a result of early diagnosis and careful treatment with anti-retroviral and TB medicines, their smiles give excellent witness to the benefits of HAART for children. May our Caritas Campaign be successful in bringing

such smiles to the faces of many more HIV-positive children in all parts of the world.