

**Speech at parallel event to
the 14th Session of the Human Rights Council on**

"Better Access to Testing and Treatment for HIV-positive Children"

Co-organised by the Association Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII and Caritas Internationalis

16th June 2010

SPEECH FOR SIDE EVENT (Dr. Maria Mercedes Rossi)

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

on behalf of the Association Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII, organiser of this parallel event on Right to Health: Better access to testing and treatment for HIV positive Children, I wish to welcome all of you and our co-sponsors and thanks in advance our panellists.

The Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII is an International Catholic association of Pontifical Right founded in the early '60 by Fr. Oreste Benzi, an Italian Catholic Priest who died in 2007. Its members (almost 2500), of all status of life, share directly the life with the least and poorest in society in many forms and are committed to remove the causes of injustice, poverty and marginalisation.

We are present in 25 countries on five continents with more then 500 welcoming centres (family-homes, therapeutic communities for drug abusers, first aid homes, daily centres, cooperatives etc.) and many projects, including health projects.

Our first involvement with people living with HIV and AIDS goes back to the last years of the '80th with the welcoming of drug abusers who were HIV positive in our therapeutic communities and family-homes and the beginning of our presence in Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania, countries that are with an high HIV prevalence. Since than we have been on the fore-front in the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In Africa, we run the Rainbow project, a large scale model of care for orphans and vulnerable children that Dr. Giulia Amerio, one of our panellists today and member of our association, will illustrate with a special focus on our health interventions on HIV and malnutrition.

Our Association joined last year the HAART campaign promoted by Caritas Internationalis on which Msgr. Vitillo will elaborate later and we work closely together with Caritas on this important and urgent advocacy.

To explain the reasons for the theme of this parallel event I would like to tell you, briefly, a story. I have been myself a missionary doctor for 20 years in Zambia and cared for many patients, adults and children, infected by HIV.

In times when antiretroviral treatment was not yet available, I had a patient, Martin, a 8 years old child, whose parents died of AIDS. He was cared for by his grand-mother and I had the privilege of

being his doctor for two years. In the last stage of HIV infection, Martin got Cryptococcal Meningitis, an opportunistic disease, and was admitted to the Children's hospital in Ndola. One day, I went to visit Martin at the Hospital. He was still alert, not in coma. I told him “Martin, I will come also tomorrow to visit you .and I asked “What should I bring to you? Some fruits? Some suits? A drink?” He looked at me with those big eyes in that wasted face and replied: “Dr. Mara, bring me the medicines!!”

So, we are here today to make Martin's plea heard. We are here today to recall that health and access to treatment are Human Rights. We are here today to tell to the Member States and all the other stakeholders that it is a matter of urgency to make medicines available to all the HIV positive children in the world whose right to Health and to life are still denied. We are here today to say that these children cannot wait, must not wait.

Thank You.