

Video Address by Archbishop Desmond Tutu
XVIII International AIDS Conference
Closing Session
Friday, 23 July 2010
Vienna, Austria

Dear Friends,

Doom and gloom have been the order of the day as the global recession has spread a blanket of hardship over much of the world. Remarkably a ray of hope and sunshine has come from an unexpected quarter – HIV/AIDS. There is no cure – yet, there is no vaccine – yet. But treatment is available. HIV is treatable, it can be managed. Lives can be saved, children need not be orphans, parents can continue to provide for their families. The hopelessness of the past can be transformed into hope for the future.

At the end of this 18th World International Conference in beautiful Vienna, this is the message we will remember from AIDS 2010.

For this transformation to become a reality it is not enough for treatment to be available. It must be accessible. Universal access was the goal of 2010. We also know now that those on treatment have less HIV circulating in their systems and are less likely to pass it on. This has potential to lower rates of HIV transmission across the world. To deny treatment is to deny life itself. I commend those leaders who have recognised that denial of treatment is a denial of the human right to life.

Africa bears the brunt of the HIV burden, we need our leaders to make their resources count in the fight against HIV. The 5.5 million precious lives still in need of treatment in poor countries need help. The HIV issue is a human rights issue. HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is a human rights priority, as much a challenge for leadership as it is to vulnerable communities. But accessible treatment can overcome the stigma that has obsessed our communities far too long. Accessible treatment allows for improved health management not only of services to those infected with HIV, but of all health services.

There are great possibilities. Much has been achieved. Antiretroviral therapy is a tremendous breakthrough and we also know how to prevent HIV effectively, with more and better prevention tools expected in the future. Yet, at this moment of great promise, the international community has yet to live up to its commitment to fully fund universal access. Now is the time to invest resources into health care, into HIV research, into training, and health management. Our leaders, especially in Africa, have a key role to play not only in mobilising limited resources creatively, but in influencing attitudes, laws and philosophies that are accepting of all God's children.

A healthy nation is a prosperous nation.

God bless you.