

Declaration of Solidarity

26th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial

Sunday, May 17th, 2009

The following statement is the official declaration of solidarity for communities participating in the 26th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, the world's oldest community movement against HIV and AIDS. The Declaration was created by the International Advisory Board of the Candlelight Memorial program, which represents every world region, in collaboration with the Global Health Council.

AIDS is one of the world's greatest challenges. Over the last quarter century, the disease has impacted our communities, families, economies, and millions of lives. And yet, communities worldwide are hopeful that a solution can be found. The theme for the 26th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is "Together, We Are the Solution." The theme represents the challenges that remain and our unwavering belief that a solution is possible. The role of civil society is critical to ending HIV and AIDS, but we cannot work alone and hope is not enough. We need action, and communities and governments must work together.

On behalf of the over one thousand communities in over a hundred countries participating today in the Candlelight Memorial, we declare our solidarity in the response to AIDS and recommit ourselves to the cause. We call on global leaders to hear our voices, honor pledges to give resources for HIV and AIDS, and increase access to prevention, treatment, and care. We call on national and community leaders to serve as examples and include people living with HIV and AIDS in the process of forming national programs. We call on businesses to invest in their communities and we ask institutions of faith to be more inclusive. And we call on the media to report the truth about HIV and AIDS, and help us share stories about what works.

Policy must be equitable and based on evidence. Treatment must be balanced with prevention. Human rights, particularly of children, must be upheld and education must be a priority. The link between AIDS and TB, malaria, and other conditions should be promptly addressed with appropriate actions and resources, and the issue of AIDS must be addressed as part of a broader problem of poverty and development, gender inequity and sexuality, and health system reform. We must move beyond fear and ignorance, and embrace people living with HIV and AIDS by replacing stigma and discrimination with understanding and support. All of us can be a part of the solution. Learn about AIDS. Get tested. Become an advocate. Join a club or volunteer.

As we gather around the world today to remember those we have lost, we stand committed to finding a solution by working together to end HIV and AIDS.

*Signed by the International Advisory Board of the
Candlelight Memorial program & the Global Health Council*