***Speaking with a Common Voice***

*The AIDS epidemic is at a critical point. A remarkable, decades-long global effort has given us the capability to end HIV and AIDS as public health threats. However, the global collective will is weakening, risking a major resurgence of the disease in the 2020s. Strong advocacy by religious voices is vital to ensuring that the world perseveres and finally brings the AIDS epidemic to an end.*

*The Common Voice pledge is an interreligious expression of advocacy and commitment that can be read responsively in worship services or other events related to the religious response to HIV and AIDS.*

**Leader:** As leaders and followers of many of the world’s great religions, we are speaking together with a common voice to urgently demand that the world re-commit to ending AIDS.

**Response:** We demand that the world’s leaders take strong actions now and in the future to ensure that this epidemic is finally brought to an end.

**Leader:** We are speaking with a common voice because our diverse religious traditions share many sacred values.

**All:** We share a belief in the inherent value and worth of all human beings.

**All:** We share a conviction that all human beings must be treated with dignity and respect.

**All:** We share a commitment to relieve human suffering.

**All:** We share a responsibility to reach out to the marginalized and to protect the vulnerable.

**Leader:** Although HIV and AIDS affect different people, regions, and social groups differently, we know that the epidemic affects the entire human community.

**Response:** As members of the human community, we commit to playing our part in bringing the epidemic to an end.

**Leader:** Religious organizations have been on the forefront in providing HIV and AIDS treatment, care, and support services since the beginning of the epidemic.

**Response:** We will remain on the forefront as long as the AIDS epidemic continues.

**Leader:** We recognize that social and cultural issues have been major barriers to effectively fighting the AIDS epidemic.

**Response:** As people of diverse religious traditions, we commit to addressing social and cultural issues with love and compassion, rather than hate or rejection.

**Leader:** We recognize that religious beliefs and practices have sometimes been used to justify judgmental attitudes and that the resulting stigma and discrimination have harmed people living with HIV and have weakened the global response to the AIDS epidemic.

**Response:** We reject these judgmental attitudes and we commit to fighting stigma and discrimination within our religious communities and within society at large.

**Leader:** We recognize that religious beliefs and practices have sometimes been used to encourage people with HIV to abandon their medical treatment, leading to many needless deaths.

**Response:** We welcome the use of non-medical interventions in helping people living with HIV, but we reject exclusive reliance on faith healing and we commit to encouraging and supporting members of our religious communities in adhering to their medical treatment for HIV.

**Leader:** We believe that followers of our religious traditions must speak loudly and persistently about the global response to the AIDS epidemic.

**Response:** We commit to being vocal advocates for strengthening the response to HIV and AIDS at the global, national, and local levels.

**Leader:** We believe that people need correct information in order to deal effectively with epidemics such as AIDS.

**Response:** We commit to providing our members with accurate information about HIV and AIDS and to dispelling harmful rumors and myths about the disease.

**Leader:** We believe that all people should have access to HIV prevention and treatment services, including people who are marginalized by society.

**Response:** We believe that HIV services must be provided with dignity and respect, and without stigma, discrimination, or fear of criminal prosecution.

**Leader:** We believe that our religious communities must be places of hope for people living with HIV.

**Response:** We believe that HIV services must address each unique individual’s physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs.

**Leader:** We believe that followers of our religious traditions have a personal responsibility to know their HIV status and to refrain from behavior that risks transmission of HIV.

**Response:** We believe that individuals must be equipped with knowledge about the full range of HIV prevention options in order to fulfill their personal responsibility.

**Leader:** We believe that followers of our traditions have an obligation to help protect future generations from epidemics such as AIDS.

**Response:** We believe that HIV services must be available for pregnant women and children with HIV and that youth in our religious communities must be equipped with the knowledge to protect themselves and others from HIV transmission.

**Leader:** We believe that we are most effective when working in collaboration with other people and organizations that are committed to similar goals.

**Response:** We commit to being strong and active partners with people living with HIV, with civil society, and with governmental organizations at all levels.

**All:** Compelled by our common values, and with prayers for perseverance, wisdom, and divine guidance, we commit to building bridges with other religious traditions and we invite followers of all traditions to join us as we work together to end AIDS.

*The Common Voice pledge was developed with the help of the World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. For more information about the Common Voice initiative, contact Dr. David Barstow at drbarstow@empactafrica.org*