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High Level Session with Ministers of Health, Business Leaders and Leaders of
UN agencies

Community Leadership and Participation.

By Dr Musimbi Kanyoro (Kenya, General Secretary, World YWCA)

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to give an input on the topic of community leadership and participation. 25 years with the AIDS pandemic has taught us that AIDS is a test for collective solidarity and leadership. What will it take for us to pass this test? If we don't act now, when millions are dying, when will we ever act in the interest of humanity or the planet? Inaction with regards to HIV and AIDS is not an option.

The reality is too loud to be ignored. You are familiar with statistics, which are indeed numbing. But we must remember that these are people are not just statistics. They are daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, children and grandparents! They have names and connections. One would expect that the loss of 40 million people and the having 15 million orphaned children would move us sufficiently to take drastic action. And yet it does not. Why? Has death become the norm or simply a scene from a movie that we can watch and then leave the cinema unmoved? Or may I suggest in frustration that lack of concerted action is because a majority of the dead are Africans, women, children, the poor and the powerless? Forgive my outrage but understand that all I want is to see us do more as Religious people, members of governments, businesses and civil society. The cost of inactivity on our part is devastatingly high. Death on this scale dramatically affects family and national economies, not to mention global governance.

Action NOW is about saving lives NOW. For a start, we can stop seeing those affected by AIDS as "them and us" but rather acknowledge that we are all affected. Today, ideological agendas and restrictions are threatening to undermine some of the positive gains that have been made in the HIV response. Government and donor restrictions on groups such as sex workers, injecting drug users and men who have sex with men are leading to further marginalization of those already in the fringes of society and fueling AIDS. We can build advocacy to change stigmatizing attitudes and actions of individuals, local communities, politicians and business leaders.

We can mobilize resources and be accountable for making sure that the money raised really does make a difference. And yes! We can speak openly and with moral authority about responsible sexual behavior of adults and young people, and we can teach values and advocate for justice and dignity for all people. This we can do if we remain honest, and base our education on

reality rather than wishful thinking. We must raise our ethical higher and think in bigger frames instead of dancing around on small arguments round ABC or immoral people or whether we support or refuse use of condoms.

Honest leadership must acknowledge that we are dealing with a pandemic that knows no boundaries and we must use all knowledge available manage and control it even before we can eradicate it. This includes putting off the fires that fuel it. Poverty, wars, conflict, violence fuel HIV. We must improve political conditions for development. Strong governments with credible leadership are best suited for long term accountability of their nations. Government must confront poverty by developing sustainable living conditions for communities, addressing corruption by demonstrating accountability, securing the human rights improving the health and prolonging the lives of those who are infected. Globally we must together work on conflict management and reconciliation where conflict is brewing. We must mobilize for moral actions to address violence, rape, child molestation, intergenerational sex incest, polygamy and "sugar daddies". Women and children are most vulnerable. Zero tolerance of all forms of gender-based violence must be a priority. Laws must be strengthened and enforced. Perpetrators must be brought to justice. These things we can do and must do.

We must strengthen preparedness for the long-term impact of AIDS even as we deal with it as an emergency. We must work on food security and teach nutrition to communities. In addition to the numerous small things we can do, major actions are urgently needed...

- **Fair Trade:** Rich nations must be willing to reduce crippling economic barriers for poor nations. One such a gesture is by slashing agricultural subsidies. This may initially hurt the giant agribusinesses and wealthy industrial sectors that receive subsidies from rich world governments. Yet the benefits would be enormous. By some estimates, ending farm subsidies would save western taxpayers US\$ 1 billion a day. Businesses know that their success depends on having a sustainable and abundant labor force that is healthy. Keeping workers alive must be a priority! AIDS now takes a toll estimated at 20-40 % of the workforce in the hardest hit countries.
- **Universal Access to Health Care:** Governments must demonstrate an unwavering commitment to providing universal access to health care. Quality, affordable treatment must be a priority, along with accessible and sustainable health care services that are gender, youth and HIV positive friendly. People across the globe are suffering because governments have failed to meet this very basic responsibility. That failure is seen in the crisis of local health systems that do not work, that exclude the poor, abuse and marginalize women; Such institutions kill hope among the sick and their care givers and, in fact, feed corruption. The result is societies marked by profound insecurity, by deep and growing inequities, and by the unacceptable toll on health and well being of girls, women and communities as a whole. The worst impact is the flight of care trained

health workers. We cannot defeat the pandemic without proper health system and personnel to run them and attend to patients. Affected nations must stop putting the blame on the individuals fleeing from horrible condition and on those who receive them in the west. People don't acquire skills for nothing. They want to use those skills and to improve their own lives and those of their children. Unless governments improve living condition in the so-called developing world, brain drain will not be stopped. Improving condition in the south is responsibility for everyone. We need fair trade, fair investment and a say in global decision-making.

- **Promote Multiple Prevention Methods:** Over the last 25 years since the history of the AIDS epidemic, it has become increasingly apparent that socially marginalized groups are disproportionately vulnerable to HIV and AIDS and its consequences. Single-focused prevention strategies such as abstinence -only campaigns are reducing access to and undermining public confidence in condoms as a tool for HIV prevention. Yet Research has demonstrated that when women and men have access to a variety of prevention options, they take more steps to protect themselves from HIV. The time has come to put away the myths and misconceptions that keep us prisoners to inaction. The time has come to demand prevention now by making sure that the female condoms are available alongside male condom in all countries. Giving women access to the female condom is not a question of cost – it is a question of moral will and global commitment.
- **Develop New Technologies:** Researchers must continue to develop other tools - medications, diagnostics and prevention technologies, notably vaccines and microbicides for the future. We need a range of choices of prevention options –to suit different lifestyles and preferences. Vaccines have characteristics that will be especially beneficial for women: they can be used before the onset of risk behaviors; they can be used with or without the knowledge of partners; they are 'in place' if women are victims of sexual violence; their delivery profile is likely to be simpler. It's important to encourage civil society to become champions for all prevention tools.
- **Keep children and their parents alive.** Ladies and gentlemen, children want their parents alive. Ask any child whose mother is sick or dead from AIDS and their greatest wish is a mother who is alive and well to look after them. 15 million orphaned children are enough! Caring for these children must go hand in glove with keeping their parents alive so that children can continue to be loved and cared for in their natural space. We must ensure that all HIV positive mothers receive treatment when they are pregnant and that treatment continues after the baby is born.
- **Set Bold Goals** The UNGASS in May 2006 was faulted for the failure of the states to set goals for their commitments. Goals help us to monitor and document success and challenges. The Millennium Development Goals call for free primary education for

every child by 2015 and ensure equal education for girls. These goals can be monitored year by year in terms of enrolment and resources.

Finally, each of us must be a visionary, wherever we are. We are in a long-term crisis situation and we must act as a people faced with an emergency of a scale, which the world has never witnessed before. In the YWCA, we have learnt that when you invite people at the table of decision making to participate, the table conversation, the size of the table and table manners must change. Governments must accommodate new ways of working with civil society. Businesses and multilateral organizations must stop their biases towards faith based groups and community NGOs. Civil Society organizations must improve structures of management. We all must work on our records of accountability and eradicate corruption. But governments must seriously take lead if change has to happen. Today is the time to act. We can wait no longer!

Thank you,

Musimbi Kanyoro