



Ladies and Gentlemen,

The jury of the Cordaid AIDS award for faith based leadership in the fight against aids has received and thoroughly examined the submissions of 27 nominees for this award. The nominees are from fifteen different countries, mainly from Africa: Zambia, DRC, Swaziland, Malawi, Italy, South Africa, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda. There were nominees from two countries in Asia: Vietnam, India. One nominee is working internationally.

The members of the jury were:

- ✚ Remco van Veen, Cordaid Team leader Central and Western Africa Department Sector Health & Well being and initiator of this price,
- ✚ Geertje van Mensvoort Cordaid linking and learning Office Sector Health & Well being Cordaid,
- ✚ Monique Lagro, Manager Sector Health & Well being Cordaid
- ✚ Barbara Berger, Independent advisor/journalist,
- ✚ Nico Keijzer, Independent advisor.

Jury report of the 1st Cordaid award for faith based leadership in the fight against AIDS

The jury was pleased to learn that 27 nominees were suggested in total, out of which nine were pre-selected. Reading about so many initiatives, feeling the energy of those strongly committed to the struggle against aids in different religions and on different continents, impressed the jury deeply. The broad participation shows the common interest of those engaged in churches, mosques of temples in the fight against aids as well as the importance of strong, committed leadership in this struggle.

The purpose of the jury was to identify nominees that reflect the following important leadership criteria:

- ✚ Courage
- ✚ Creativity
- ✚ Personal integrity
- ✚ Initiative
- ✚ Personal sacrifice

The jury felt that the content of the submissions reflected many of the above mentioned leadership characteristics. All pre-selected nominees gave a very high score on personal integrity, sacrifice and courage, often as the nominees said, based upon and strongly supported by their own faith. However, other leadership qualities like initiative, creativity and – indirect – innovation were modest but not exceptional. Having said this, the jury must admit that it was confronted with the problem of great difference in terms of size and scope of organisations, contextual differences (e.g. what is courageous in one context is quite common in another), and the impossibility to compare fairly individual nominees versus organisations.

The jury therefore decided to split the price in two categories:

- ✚ The first category being the **organisation award** for faith based leadership in the fight against aids (15 000 euro)
- ✚ The second category being the **individual award** for faith based leadership in the fight against aids (5000 euro)



Category 1: Organisation award for faith based leadership in the fight against aids

Here the choice was particularly difficult but for good reasons: the jury was confronted with a number of organisation nominees that are very effective in their strategies in the fight against aids, some of them in the forefront in their respective countries both in terms of scale and in terms of courageous initiative.

We decided to award the price to an organisation that has successfully and very visible challenged institutional churches to become real hiv/aids friendly churches. A small board in the church saying 'This church is hiv/aids friendly', quite simple with a strong and complex world behind it, making a long story short, a clear signal of openness, meaningful and inviting to church members and strangers. This organisation shows leadership, creativity and perseverance in a strategy that effectively has demonstrated to break stigma in church communities and transform exclusion into inclusiveness, compassion and hope.

It has done so by training and preaching in churches to challenge the judgmentalism which is the big barrier for any substantial step in the fight against aids. It invites and encourages churches, which have gone through a process of discussion and confrontation, action and counselling, to place the board, thus reminding each other every second of the real openness they want to achieve in church life. Hiv/aids teams were formed to bring hiv/aids issues into the church organisation, catalysing many activities like World Aids day services, having speakers in the congregation who live with Hiv.

They conducted the famous 'walk for witness' in the city streets by 3500 people ending by two bishops who publicly went for testing, giving a personal example to many people following their footsteps. Moreover, its strategy is a good practice that is scalable, that can be an example for other organisations irrespective of denomination or context. One could even think of developing an (inter)national quality mark for 'Hiv friendly Churches' with a related accreditation system to guarantee the standard of HIV-friendliness. But this goes beyond the mandate of this jury....

The winner in the category of organisations for the Cordaid award 2008 for faith based leadership in the fight against aids is:

FIKELELA AIDS PROJECT, Cape Town, South Africa.



Category 2: Individual award for faith based leadership in the fight against aids

In this category the choice for the jury was slightly simpler by the sheer fact that there were fewer nominees. Although here the individual stories and efforts made in the fight against aids all reflected strong leadership and perseverance. Therefore it was still a hard choice to make as the personal context is even more important for the individual award.

We choose for a winner living in a country where hiv/aids is not related to widespread promiscuity like in Africa. In Vietnam, the core of the epidemic is located in the underground movement of injecting drug users and commercial sex workers. The stigma is hard for a hiv-infected person: automatically finger pointed as part of an illegal (underground) world, discriminated by all other layers of society, harassed by police, automatically marked as 'criminal'.

It's terribly hard for people in Vietnam to disclose their positive status. Doing so would mean to lose your friends, not able to get a job anymore. In brief it means you become socially excluded in a society where shame is a strong cultural force. Working on hiv/aids issues in Vietnam is very difficult and very sensitive work, even more as it is – in the public opinion and judgement – related to an underground and dangerous world. She contracted hiv because she got stung by the needle with which she administered medication to her hiv-positive brother. After the devastation she felt when discovering she was hiv-positive, she stood up and formed the still growing **Milk Flower group**, where people can share their difficulties of living with hiv and be among friends again. It also gives the badly needed mental and physical support to people dying from aids. Her faith helped her to answer her own questions and grow into being a leader of her group. The group, now supported by the church, carries out community activities on prevention, fighting stigma and discrimination in schools and church group for youth. It organised a condom demonstration on World Aids Day, a quite shocking event in a very judgmental society. Even while hospitalised for a lung disease, she kept on supporting the group and its activities.

She is one of just a few Hiv-positive people in Vietnam who have dared to fight back against the discrimination inflicted on her by her own community. She is proud again, found meaning in life and supports others in restoring their self-respect and in finding meaning in life again.

The winner in the category individuals for the Cordaid award for faith based leadership in the fight against aids is:

Mrs. DAO PHUONG THANH from Hanoi, Vietnam.