

Implementing the UN's Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

A Guide for Canadian AIDS Service Organizations



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Background

At the end of 2002, there were 42 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world¹, including 50,000 in Canada²; just under 21 million people had died from AIDS. In recognition of the seriousness of the epidemic and the urgency of stepping up the response, a United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS was held in June 2001. At the end of that session, all 189 UN member countries endorsed a Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. This document is sometimes referred to as the UNGASS Declaration.

The Declaration of Commitment sets out a comprehensive strategy for dealing with HIV/AIDS, with clear targets and timelines. The Declaration covers 11 broad areas: leadership, prevention, care, support and treatment, human rights, reducing vulnerability, children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, alleviating social and economic impact, research and development, HIV/AIDS in conflict and disaster-affected regions, resources, and follow-up.

By 2003, countries will enact, strengthen or enforce (as appropriate) legislation, regulations and other measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS and members of vulnerable groups.

Paragraph 58, Declaration of Commitment

The Relevance of the Declaration to Canadian ASOs

The Declaration's vision for dealing with HIV/AIDS is more detailed than anything that has been produced so far in Canada and the Government of Canada is committed to its implementation. This conjunction of vision and political will have combined to create a powerful opportunity.

By 2003, countries will establish time-bound national targets designed to bring about a reduction of 25% in HIV prevalence among people aged 15-24 by 2005 in the most-affected countries, and by 2010 globally.

Paragraph 47, Declaration of Commitment

Consequently, AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) can use the Declaration as a potent tool for lobbying the federal and other levels of government to improve the domestic and international response to HIV/AIDS.

By 2005, countries will develop comprehensive care strategies to strengthen family and community-based care.

Paragraph 56, Declaration of Commitment

The Declaration of Commitment provides an opportunity to participate in a global partnership to stop the spread of HIV. And a global partnership is needed because the factors that lead to the spread of the virus are common to every nation. As one Canadian sex trade worker has pointed out, "If you have to sell your body to ten people to put enough food on your table to feed your family, what's the difference if you're in Canada or Africa?"³

Ten Ways to Use the Declaration

ASOs can use the Declaration of Commitment to educate or advocate in many different ways. Here are ten suggestions:

1. Familiarize yourselves with the content of the Declaration. Distribute copies to staff, board, volunteers and members. Plan an organization-wide information session.
2. Distribute copies of the Declaration to organizations and individuals in your community who are working on HIV/AIDS, human rights or international development. Include health care professionals, researchers, politicians, government officials and the media. Organize a public information session.
3. Connect with other organizations that have used the Declaration of Commitment in their work. These organizations are not necessarily restricted to ASOs; they could also include community partners (e.g., educational, justice, or faith-based organizations).
4. Connect specific sections of the Declaration to work your organization is already doing and use its authority to make that work stronger.
5. Use the Declaration to identify areas for future program development not yet served by your organization.
6. Formally endorse the Declaration.
7. Use the Declaration to support your funding proposals.
8. Use the Declaration as a tool to advocate for improved programs and greater resources to combat the epidemic in your province or territory. Work with other ASOs and national coalitions

to advocate for these goals at the national level. There are over 50 targets and commitments in the Declaration. Since not all of them precisely fit the Canadian context, and not all will be relevant to your organization, decide which ones to concentrate on.

By 2005, countries will develop and accelerate the implementation of national strategies that promote the advancement of women and women's full enjoyment of all human rights.

*Paragraph 59,
Declaration of Commitment*

9. Work with other ASOs to develop strategies to monitor the implementation of the Declaration in your province or territory, as well as at the national level. Apply the indicators outlined in the Declaration to monitor your organization's work.
10. Share your experiences and lessons learned with other ASOs.

Additional suggestions can be found in the *Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*, produced by the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO). Examples of actions implemented by ASOs around the world are contained in *Update on the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*, another ICASO document. (See the Resources section below to learn how to obtain these and other publications.)

AIDS Calgary's Groundbreaking Experience

The AIDS Calgary Awareness Association has successfully integrated the Declaration of Commitment into its work. Some of the initiatives it took may also be helpful for your organization. Here are some of them:

- It identified a staff member to assess the relevance of the Declaration to the agency and to evaluate the feasibility of implementing the Declaration at a community level.
- It identified areas in the Declaration that were already being addressed within the agency. For example, the Declaration calls for measures to help alleviate poverty; AIDS Calgary does this work already through emergency financial support and the Good Food Box Program. Identifying this overlap helped to reassure people in the agency that they weren't being asked to take on a lot of new work when available staff and other resources were limited.
- It consulted with key stakeholders within the organization (clients, staff, management, the board) to ensure that they supported AIDS Calgary's continued involvement in national and international issues.
- It formally endorsed the Declaration, so that the UN commitment became AIDS Calgary's commitment.
- It actively used the Declaration to guide program planning, referring to specific sections of the Declaration in funding proposals.

- It has used the Declaration as an advocacy tool to demonstrate why a locally-focused ASO should commit resources and energy toward global action against HIV/AIDS.

The process convinced AIDS Calgary that local community-based organizations have a role to play in putting the Declaration of Commitment into action. Integrating the Declaration in its work has provided the association with the opportunity to expand partnerships locally, nationally and internationally. AIDS Calgary is currently identifying local initiatives that tie-in to the commitments in the Declaration and that can be included in future workplans.

AIDS Calgary is committed to sharing its experience with others and to supporting other ASOs working with the Declaration whenever possible. Contact it at www.aidscalgary.org.

Reporting on Progress in Implementing the Declaration

The Declaration of Commitment requires that governments conduct periodic national reviews of the implementation of the Declaration, with the participation of civil society and persons living with HIV/AIDS. It also requires that governments develop "appropriate monitoring and evaluation measurements and instruments."⁴

Canada submitted its first national review to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in June 2002. UNAIDS had asked each country to file an annual progress report, based on a common questionnaire. On the basis of the reports filed by Canada and other countries, UNAIDS drafted a global progress report, which the Secretary General submitted in August 2002, and which the UN General Assembly discussed that November.

By 2003, countries will implement strategies to address those factors that make individuals particularly vulnerable to HIV infection.

*Paragraph 62,
Declaration of Commitment*

(See the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress Towards Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS in the Resources section.) This process - whereby the UN Secretary General prepares an annual progress report on the Declaration's implementation that is then reviewed and debated at an annual session of the UN General Assembly⁵ - is one that is detailed in the Declaration itself.

Also in August 2002, UNAIDS released a series of global and national core indicators to help monitor the implementation of the Declaration. The core indicators measure significant steps in combating the spread of the epidemic. Canada is planning to use these indicators to structure its 2003 report.

AIDS Service Organizations can use the core indicators to demonstrate that their present and proposed work is aligned with the UN plan for the Declaration's implementation. For a snapshot of the indicators at the global and national levels, go to : www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html and find *Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: Core Indicators.*

An Outstanding Issue

Among many outstanding issues, one stands out: Although the Declaration specifically calls for a co-ordinated, national strategy to combat HIV/AIDS within participating countries, Canada's plan is still poorly integrated between and within the national and the various provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Individuals working in particular ASOs - the frontline in the Canadian fight against HIV/AIDS - would get a powerful synergistic boost from a national strategy that links all efforts into a common context. To bring such a strategy about, a wide-ranging Canadian discussion on how the commitments in the Declaration of Commitment should affect our response to the epidemic would be invaluable. (As yet, there has been no formal attempt to link the Declaration and the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS (CSHA).) Some questions for discussion are these:

- Since the Declaration specifically states that the challenges of HIV/AIDS can't be met without additional and sustained resources⁶, how will the CSHA address the need for increased resources?
- How will provincial and territorial governments address this need?
- How can Canada provide more support to the global response?
- How can the Declaration be used as a monitoring and evaluative tool for the CSHA?
- How will Canada be held accountable for its commitment to the Declaration?
- How will governments at all levels in Canada implement the Declaration of Commitment?

Conclusion

The Declaration is an invaluable tool for ASOs. It can be used to educate and advocate around HIV/AIDS issues, to beneficially develop new programs and to improve old ones. ASOs who use the Declaration in their programming will be contributing to a domestic response to the pandemic that is in step with current global perspectives and requirements. While this domestic-global coordination is vital to confronting the epidemic, a significant further benefit is that ASOs who utilize the Declaration in their programming are likely to improve and increase the impact of their own work.

Resources

Documents

A description of some Declaration-related documents and where to find them.

Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (Full Version) *United Nations, August 2001.* This 48-page booklet, which provides the full text of the Declaration, was produced by the United Nations Department of Public Information and UNAIDS in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Portuguese. The text is 103 paragraphs in length and quite accessible. Hard copies of the booklet can be obtained from ICAD. Copies can also be downloaded in PDF format from the UNAIDS website at www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html.

Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

ICASO, October 2001. This publication provides national and regional strategies for using the Declaration to enhance the response to HIV/AIDS. It is available in English, French and Spanish, and can be downloaded in PDF format from the ICASO website at:

icaso.org/icaso/ungass/advguidedectncomit.htm.

Government of Canada 2002 Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations on the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

This is Canada's first progress report on implementing the Declaration of Commitment. It is available in English and French. The English version can be downloaded in HTML or PDF format from the website of Health Canada's International Affairs Directorate at:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/datapcb/iad/ih_hiv aids-e.htm.

Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: Core Indicators

UNAIDS, August 2002. This is a list of the core indicators developed by UNAIDS to assist with the monitoring of the implementation of the Declaration. It is available in English, French, Spanish and Russian, and can be downloaded in PDF format from the UNAIDS website at:

www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html.

Keeping the Promise: Summary of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

United Nations, June 2002. This 38-page booklet, produced by UNAIDS in English, French, Spanish and Russian, contains a simplified version of the text of the Declaration, as well as quotes from some of the people involved in the UNGASS process. The full text of the Declaration is included in the appendix as well. Hard copies of *Keeping the Promise* can be obtained Information Manager, UNAIDS, 20 avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland . A PDF version can be downloaded from the UNAIDS website at:

www.unaids.org/UNGASS/promise.html.

Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: Guidelines on Construction of Core Indicators
UNAIDS, August 2002. This 72-page publication is designed to provide countries with technical guidance on how the core indicators were developed, how they should be interpreted and what information is required for each indicator. It is available in English, French, Spanish and Russian, and can be downloaded from the UNAIDS website at:
www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html.

Report of the Secretary-General on Progress Towards Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

United Nations, 12 Aug 2002. This is the UN Secretary General's first annual progress report on the implementation of the Declaration. It is available in English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic, and can be downloaded in PDF format from the UN website at:
www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html.

To Share and To Learn: The Case for Canadians to Act Globally Against HIV/AIDS

Health Canada, 2000. This publication, produced by Health Canada's International Affairs Directorate, explains why Canadians should get involved in the global response to the epidemic. Hard copies can be obtained from the Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre. Tel: 613-725-3434, Fax: 613-725-1205; email: aidssida@cpha.ca; website: www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca. Copies can also be downloaded in PDF format from:
dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection/H21-155-2000E.pdf

Update on the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

ICASO, July 2002. This publication provides examples of how organizations around the world have used the Declaration to strengthen their advocacy and educational efforts. It is available in English, French and Spanish, and can be downloaded in PDF format on the ICASO website at:
icaso.org/icaso/icaso.html.

Organizations

Names and websites of some organizations that have worked extensively with the Declaration of Commitment.

AIDS Calgary Awareness Association (ACAA)
www.aidscalgary.org

Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations (AFAO)
www.afao.org.au

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
www.aidslaw.ca

Health Canada General site
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS
www.aidsida.com

Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)
www.icad-cisd.com

International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)
www.icaso.org

¹ *UNAIDS Epidemic Update, December 2002.* Available on the UNAIDS website at:
www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/documents.html#ward.

² *Health Canada Surveillance Report, December 31, 2002.* Available on the Health Canada website at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/aids-sida/haic-vsac1201/index.html.

³ As quoted in AIDS Calgary Awareness Association's, *Combating a Global Pandemic: A Community Based Response.* Presentation at the ICAD AGM, September 2002. Available on the AIDS Calgary website at:
www.aidscalgary.org.

⁴ *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.* Paragraphs 94 and 95.

⁵ *Ibid.* Paragraph 100.

⁶ *Supra*, note 4. Paragraphs 80 and 82.