



Opinion

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AIDS Tragedy Gets Lost in the Headlines

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 and their aftermath have upstaged other tragedies in the world's attention, including the on-going tragedy of HIV/AIDS around the world.

Even the marking of Dec. 1 as World AIDS Day somehow got lost in the headlines of the growing violence in the Middle East, the bombings in Afghanistan and the continuing mystery of anthrax in America.

Although we in the U.S. tend to think that AIDS is a disease which had been eradicated because of the success of antiretroviral drugs over the past decade, nothing could be further from the truth.

Indeed, as American public health officials focus on anthrax and the possibilities of smallpox infection, HIV/AIDS continues to stalk poor people and people of color. For example, the African American community, which is about 12 percent of the U.S. population, accounts for 47 percent of the U.S. AIDS cases reported in 2000. Young women of color are particularly vulnerable, with almost one-third of new HIV-positive cases among women.

And if HIV/AIDS in the U.S. has dropped off the radar screen of most Americans, one can be sure that we have very little understanding of the impact of this disease around the world.

Most of us, for instance, have no idea that there are 40 million

people in the world living with HIV/AIDS, including 2.7 million children. In this year alone, 5 million new people were infected with the disease and 3 million, including more than half a million children, have died from it.

In Africa HIV/AIDS has taken on a whole new meaning. Indeed, a whole generation of Africans has been nearly wiped out. More

whom the poor nations of Africa rely on for public management and core social services.

But the impact of the AIDS epidemic in Africa is not only on those who are dying.

There are the millions of orphans in a society, which in the past always cared for orphaned children within the extended family, but now finds no family left.

Too many people in the world are living with their heads in the sand when it comes to HIV/AIDS.

—Bernice Powell Jackson, executive minister,
United Church of Christ

than two-thirds of those who died from AIDS this year were Africans. Millions more have died in the past decade.

That means that 7 million African farmers have died since 1985, with another 16 million expected to die, which translates to widespread food shortages and very real hunger for millions of people. That means that millions of school children have lost their teachers to AIDS, with hundreds of schools forced to close. That means that large numbers of doctors and health care workers are dying, as are many of the small number of highly skilled civil servants upon

How will these children be fed and clothed and cared for by a social service system that too often finds its funds diverted to pay off national debts still carried by some developing nations?

How will these poor nations get the estimated 15 percent of their national budget needed to improve their health care when their young adult generation has been decimated? And what about the tens of thousands of children in Africa who are living with HIV/AIDS and who surely will die without the necessary and expensive medications?

HIV/AIDS has become the biggest threat to the continent's

development in our lifetime. All of which makes even more incredible the position of South African President Thabo Mbeki who still seems to be in complete denial about his nation and AIDS.

Early on in his presidency and despite years of scientific evidence, he refused to acknowledge that HIV leads to AIDS and was slow in getting his national public health officials working on the crisis.

Despite President Mbeki's claim that AIDS is not a crisis in South Africa, one in nine South Africans is living with AIDS and a third of the pregnant women in some provinces there have tested positive for the virus. Yet, he still refuses to make available to these women the drug which might prevent the unborn children from getting the deadly disease.

Unfortunately, like President Mbeki, too many people in the world are living with their heads in the sand when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Too many people in the church, too many people in the mosque, too many people in public positions, too many people in schools, too many people in prisons, too many people everywhere believe that HIV/AIDS doesn't impact them.

HIV/AIDS is a totally preventable disease, but the first step must be acknowledgment that the world and our communities are in a crisis and we can do something about it. That would be a wonderful turn of events in this new century and this new millennium.

Help Fight Famine in Afghanistan

Interfaith Council of Greater Portland stirs compassion for the suffering with moral obligation to meet human needs

A humanitarian disaster is unfolding in Afghanistan. The United Nations estimates millions of people are threatened with starvation.

With the arrival of winter, the situation is desperate. Thousands have already perished, and the weakest that are most at risk are the children and the elderly.

Leading international aid organizations describe a deteriorating situation.

Food distribution, drastically reduced during the bombing, is now further encumbered by political

instability and general chaos sweeping the country. Shelter and supplies are lacking. Banditry, looting, and factionalism continue to prevent food delivery, and most foreign aid workers cannot return to the country, as their safety cannot be assured.

As the Interfaith Council of Greater Portland, we feel compassion for the suffering of innocent women, men, and children, and see the moral obligation to meet human need with adequate resources. The imminent risk to millions of civilians must not be treated as incidental to

this conflict.

As leaders of the religious community, we have a moral responsibility to address this emergency, and we call the people of faith and of good conscience of this state and of this nation to join us immediately in supporting aid organizations in their plea for the creation of an international security force to protect aid convoys and aid workers.

The cooperation of the U.S. government and their allies with aid organizations is essential for

relief efforts to be successful.

We ask government and non-governmental organizations to provide sufficient monetary assistance to independent aid organizations working in the region, with special attention given to the external refugee situation in neighboring countries.

We make these requests in the spirit of this season's holy days that the caring and hope they inspire may also compel us to alleviate the precarious situation in Afghanistan.

The Interfaith Council of Greater Portland

To The Editor: Workplace Law Will Save Lives

In just a few days, Oregon's new Smokefree Workplace Law goes into effect.

Passed by the Oregon Legislature, it will protect an additional half-million Oregonians from the known dangers posed by secondhand tobacco smoke in 2002 and beyond.

Oregon leads the way in the effort to protect people from secondhand smoke. We join Washington, California and Maryland as the only states in the nation to restrict smoking in the workplace. When it goes into effect Jan. 1, it is estimated that 95 percent of employees across the state will be covered by the new law.

If you are an employer in Oregon, it is important to learn how easy it is to comply. And from a larger perspective, I believe it is an important service to readers to demonstrate the positive impacts on our society resulting from Oregon's new Smokefree Workplace Law.

Eliminating a known killer, secondhand tobacco smoke from the workplace will save thousands of lives and millions of dollars. I appreciate your help informing the public about this important change in state law.

Dr. Mel Kohn

Oregon State Epidemiologist

Maranatha Church

Building Divine Unity in the Community

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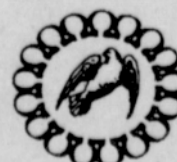


T. Allen & Daphne Bethel

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and Holidays)

Wednesday Night ~ 7:00pm
(Activities for the whole family)



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Rev. Cynthia Brathwaite, Associate Pastor