

Appeal for Urgent Attention to the Situation of Children Living with HIV or with HIV/TB Co-Infection

Oral Statement under Item 2 – Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, submitted for the 19th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council by Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities), Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Association Points-Coeur, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers), Dominican Leadership Conference, Fédération Internationale d'Associations de Médecins Catholiques, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Catholic Rural Association, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice, Marist International Solidarity Foundation, New Humanity, VIDES Internazionale, and World Union of Catholic Women's Organization.

Caritas Internationalis joins with other 12 NGOs to take note of the Report on the protection of Human Rights in the context of HIV and AIDS, but, at the same time, the co-signatories regret that the Report lacks sufficient attention to the alarming situation of children living with HIV or with HIV/TB co-infection.

Estimates show that, at the end of 2010, 2.01 million children were living with HIV. Of the latter only 22% had access to appropriate antiretroviral treatment. 50% of untreated HIV-positive children die before their second birthday, and the mortality rate reaches 80% by the time such children reach five years of age.

Approximately 90% of HIV-infected infants are born to mothers who were never tested and never received prophylaxis to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Even if the HIV status of infants could be determined immediately after birth, in 2009 only the 6% of children born to women living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries were tested within the first two months of life.

With regard to HIV/TB co-infection, WHO estimates that a third of HIV-positive people around the world are co-infected with TB. More than 250,000 children develop TB, and 100,000 children will continue to die each year from TB.

There are many and varied obstacles to achieving access to appropriate diagnosis and treatment of children living with HIV or with HIV/TB co-infection, and to means of prevention, through antiretroviral treatment, of vertical transmission of HIV by pregnant women living with the virus: high levels of stigma; lack of accessible fixed dose combinations of antiretrovirals for infants, and still not affordable prices for early child-friendly diagnostic tests; fragility and lack of specialized personnel in health systems, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider access to medicine in the broader context of the Social Determinants of Health, bearing in mind that Human Rights are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

For these reasons, the co-signatories call upon Madame High Commissioner and her Office to take effective action for assuring universal access to testing and treatment for all, in particular for children living with HIV or HIV/TB co-infection. Universal access to testing and treatment could serve as "litmus test" for measuring the commitments made by States to promote integral human development and health for all, but most especially for the poorest and most marginalized people.