



INTERNATIONAL
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ALLIANCE

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ICA Message

International Women's Day, 8 March 2004 "Women and HIV/AIDS"

This year the United Nations has chosen to focus on the theme of "Women and HIV/AIDS" for the celebration of International Women's Day 2004.



The ICA, and its Gender Equality Committee in particular, welcomes this initiative as HIV/AIDS is a pandemic around the world that continues to spread causing misery and death. It also greatly helps in the follow-up of the ICA joint seminar organised by the Gender Equality Committee and International Health Co-operative Organisation during the last ICA General Assembly (Oslo, September 2003) which focused on this very problem and underlines the important activities currently being undertaken by ICA's regional offices in Africa and Asia/Pacific to tackle the problem.

HIV/AIDS has a profound impact on societies from both an economic and cultural perspective. For many countries, especially in Africa and Asia, it means a collapse of the economy and for co-operatives it means lack of economic performance and the painful loss of members and employees.

One of the most recent UN reports highlighted that women are increasingly bearing the brunt of the illness both as victims of HIV/AIDS but also as care-givers to others that are infected. These reports also clearly link the high rate of infection of women with that the imbalance between the roles of men and women in the family and society and lack of gender equality worldwide.

The terrible consequences of HIV/AIDS not only touch women and men, but increasingly children. More and more boys and girls are affected by the illness themselves, are orphaned or are victims of the loss of a parent and the economic, cultural and social consequences this brings. Mobilisation of methods to reduce transmission of the virus to children in childbirth must also be a priority area of our concern. Entire societies are being devastated by this pandemic.

The rates of HIV/AIDS infection are rising in many parts of the world. We must seriously tackle this to ensure healthy and productive societies.

We must remember too that AIDS is not only a health problem, but an economic, social and cultural challenge. Co-operatives can play an important role contributing to stopping this modern day plague through actions ranging from reducing poverty, promoting gender equality and providing education and information to their members and to the communities in which they operate. The strength of co-operatives is that they traditionally work in social and cultural spheres alongside their business interests. Let us today promote this strength to focus on the fight against HIV/AIDS. We know that it will not be easy, and care is needed as

HIV/AIDS stirs up strong religious and deeply-rooted cultural beliefs, but we can no longer ignore this reality if we want to strengthen the co-operative role around the world.

ICA supports the UN in its fight of HIV/AIDS and concurs with the UN Secretary-General's in his message for International Women's Day, when he says:

“What is needed is positive, concrete change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

Change that will strengthen legal protection of women's property and inheritance rights, and ensure they have full access to prevention options.

Change that makes men assume their responsibility -- whether ensuring their daughters get an education; abstaining from sexual behaviour that puts others at risk; forgoing relations with girls and very young women; or understanding that when it comes to violence against women, there are no grounds for tolerance and no tolerable excuses.”

Members of ICA and its regional offices are already working towards fighting HIV/AIDS. Partnerships with international organisations and civil society organisations are in the process of being initiated to collect and share best practice.

ICA urges all its members to support efforts to fight the HIV/AIDS by working to eradicate poverty, make gender equality a reality, and raise awareness on HIV/AIDS through partnerships in their countries and at all levels.

Together we can make a difference !

Ivano Barberini
ICA President

Vanda Giuliano
Chair, ICA Gender Equality Committee

The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-government association which unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was founded in London in 1895. Its members are national and international co-operative organisations in all sectors of activity including, agricultural, banking, fisheries, housing, tourism, and consumer co-operatives. ICA has more than 200 member organisations from over 100 countries, representing more than 760 million individuals worldwide.

The ICA Gender Equality Committee is a thematic committee of the ICA which promotes equality between women and men and gender integration in the co-operative movement and society.