

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

To:
Oversight Committee Secretariat
UNAIDS Second Independent Evaluation Oversight Committee
Room V25
c/o UNAIDS
20, avenue Appia
CH-1211, Geneva 27
Switzerland

From:
Jon O'Brien
President, Catholics for Choice
Catholics for Choice
1436 U Street NW, Suite 301
Washington DC 20009
USA

Submitted via e-mail

September 25, 2008

The following is a submission to the Oversight Committee Secretariat on behalf of Catholics for Choice on the draft Inception Report (IR).

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a significant role in dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many provide and pay for services that governmental organizations cannot; others supplement existing services in vital and innovative ways.

For example, the Condoms4Life campaign—the seven-year-old worldwide public education effort to raise public awareness about the devastating effect of, and widespread Catholic opposition to, the Catholic hierarchy's ban on condoms—has used its materials to inform the debate in new ways, showing that people of faith use and support the use of condoms.

The campaign was launched on World AIDS Day 2001 with the display of billboards

PRESIDENT

Jon O'Brien

VICE PRESIDENT

Sara Morello

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marysa Navarro-Aranguren,
Chair

Sheila Briggs

Patricia Carbine, *Treasurer*

Barbara DeConcini

Susan Farrell

Cheryl Francisconi

Ofelia Garcia

Eileen Moran, *Secretary*

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Albert George Thomas

Marian Stewart Titus

Susan Wysocki

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir
*Buenos Aires, Argentina
Cordoba, Argentina*

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en Bolivia
La Paz, Bolivia

Católicas pelo Direito de Decidir
São Paulo, Brasil

Catholics for a Free Choice Canada
Toronto, Canada

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en Chile
Valparaíso, Chile

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en Colombia
Bogotá, Colombia

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en España
Madrid, España

Catholics for Choice
Frankfurt, Germany

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir
México, D.F., México

and ads in subways and newspapers saying “Banning Condoms Kills.” We felt it was important that Catholics and non-Catholics alike made their voices heard on this important health question. While condoms are not a panacea to the AIDS epidemic, they do offer an important protection that should be available to anyone, regardless of economic power or geographical position.

This campaign made available resources and fact-based evidence showing that Catholics support the use of condoms, despite what the Catholic hierarchy would have many believe, and supplemented existing evidence about the efficacy of condoms. This campaign is ongoing.

We note the concerns raised both at the AIDS meeting in Mexico City and in some previous submissions that some people have expressed suspicions of or negative prejudices about FBOs. We suggest that those suspicions and prejudices may be, in some cases, deserved.

For example, we have serious concerns about the Vatican’s continued and active lobbying around the world and at the United Nations to restrict people’s access to condoms, claiming that condoms cause AIDS, not prevent it. An excellent example of this took place in Washington, DC, earlier this year.

The Lantos/Hyde HIV/AIDS Global Leadership Act was gutted of several practical, life-saving programs as a result of lobbying by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Despite increasing funding overall, Congress:

- decoupled vital family planning services that can prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
- expanded the “conscience clause” that enables organizations receiving US funding to pick and choose the prevention and treatment services they wish to provide.
- retained the anti-prostitution pledge, further marginalizing an extremely at-risk group; and
- imposed a complex formula that calls for at least fifty percent of prevention funding to be spent on abstinence and faithfulness programs, rather than allowing experienced agencies to decide how best to spend the funds depending on local circumstances.

The US bishops, in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), supported these damaging measures from a self-serving perspective that few Catholics share, let alone those of other and no religious preference. Catholics in the United States and elsewhere support aid for international family planning and reject abstinence-only programs. Studies show that properly directed funding for international family planning programs saves women's lives and the lives of their children when those women have HIV/AIDS. Many studies, including some sponsored by the US Congress, show that abstinence-only programs do not work. The bishops ignored this evidence to ensure that their own narrow, out-of-the-mainstream beliefs held sway.

We believe that UNAIDS and other international bodies should pay significant attention to the core beliefs of FBOs when it comes to judging the role they play in any program. Some, though by no means all, use religious beliefs and not proven public health outcomes to determine prevention strategies. Others provide excellent services and play a vital role in preventing the spread of the disease and caring for those infected.

There is no doubt that FBOs have important role to play in the battle against HIV and AIDS. However, they and the results they achieve should be held to the same standards as any other NGO.



Jon O'Brien
President