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THE SYNERGY PROJECT

ADDING VALUE TO INTERNATIONAL HIV/AIDS PREVENTION & CARE

Framework for Proposed White House Summit for U.S. and African Faith Leaders on HIV/AIDS

The Life Initiative, formalized in November 1999, suggests that U.S.- and African-based groups meet in a series of "partnership meetings" to engage each other in responding to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. The White House summit of labor leaders earlier this year is one example of the partnership meetings called for. Another example is the proposed gathering of faith groups charged with the task of identifying "U.S. and international faith networks that will ultimately create networks and support for prevention, counseling, psychosocial support and care interventions in sub-Saharan Africa."¹

The Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP) has proposed a White House Summit for World Religious Leaders (working title) to take place in late September/early October (no firm date has been fixed). ONAP has made it very clear that this is an event that the President himself will want to participate in, and that it does not have any linkage to the election cycle. At this time, detailed planning around format, agenda, etc. is limited because a firm date has not yet been established by White House scheduling.

Rationale

Religious leaders and institutions have a powerful voice in society, both in the U.S. and in Africa. Churches, mosques and temples are found in nearly every community and wield a significant level of cultural, social, educational and economic influence. Indeed, faith-based organizations can be viewed as the largest, most stable and extensively dispersed non-governmental organizations in any country. To varying degrees they possess the human, physical, technical and financial resources needed to support and implement small- and large-scale initiatives. They have the infrastructures, networks, means and mandate to combat HIV/AIDS, yet much of their vast potential and resources remain untapped to date.

It is estimated that 50 percent of all HIV/AIDS-related care in Africa is provided by faith-based NGOs. Ten different types of faith-based NGOs have been identified as currently operating a wide variety of HIV/AIDS-related interventions in Africa. These faith-based NGO's range in size from the large international networks, such as Caritas Internationalis, Muslim Aid and MAP International, to small groups at the local level, such as a handful of nuns independently operating an AIDS hospice in Uganda, or an Episcopal congregation in Falls Church, Virginia, that sends its members to its "sister congregation" in Kenya to provide HIV/AIDS-related education, support and training.

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Remembering that both U.S. and African communities of faith are invariably members of even larger *global* religious families, the proposed Summit will provide a high profile opportunity for U.S. religious leaders to affirm and increase their levels of commitment to the fight against AIDS in Africa, while also providing their African counterparts with opportunities to articulate how existing faith-based interventions may be supplemented and enhanced. The meeting may also provide a forum for deliberation around difficult ethical issues raised by certain prevention interventions, such as the promotion of condom use. It is being argued by some, however, that these "deliberations" could degenerate into divisive debate and that the summit could be more productive if focused on a "call to compassion" and the unique role that faith communities can play in meeting the care and support needs of infected and directly affected individuals and families.

Proposed Format

A one-day meeting preceded by a White House Prayer Breakfast attended by the President, ending with an interfaith service at Washington National Cathedral. One or two days of additional "working sessions" may be scheduled for some participants.

Participants

A total of 60-70 invited participants is anticipated, representing the broad range of faith-based organizations active in Africa as well as religious leaders and heads of denominations from both the United States and Africa. Confining the invitation list to this number will likely pose a significant challenge given the multiple representational issues that will have to be taken into consideration. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been invited to chair or co-chair the meeting but his participation is questionable given his failing health. ONAP has also proposed that the Dalai Lama participate, perhaps as co-chair.

Outcomes

It is hoped that religious leaders would return to their institutions from the Summit and use their considerable influence to engender immediate support and *action* from their networks of congregations to the fight against AIDS in Africa. Beyond the customary record of proceedings that can be widely disseminated, ONAP would like to see the attendees also sign a "joint statement" that describes the commitments of the participating religious leaders to a greater involvement in the fight against AIDS in Africa. However, while such a statement may be a desirable outcome, it may prove difficult to attain given the hierarchical nature of policy development in most religious institutions.

Budget and Funding

Preliminary cost estimates range from \$300-500,000. Funding sources, either public or private, have yet to be identified.

Progress to date

- African Missions have submitted names of potential invitees from among religious leaders already active in HIV/AIDS work (see attached "Matrix of Potential Participants").
- Meetings have been held with Sandra Thurman and ONAP personnel to clarify expectations and begin detailed planning.

- A typology of different types and levels of faith-based organizations responding to AIDS has been developed (see attached “Typology of FBOs”).
- Contract support for this effort, and longer-term planning and action regarding faith-based responses has been negotiated and is in place at Synergy/TvT.
- Lists of possible invitees are being assembled for review by the Director, ONAP (see attached “Matrix of Potential Participants”).

Significant Issues to be Resolved

- Securing necessary funds for implementation is still needed.
- Date(s) for event must be finalized.
- Longer-term plans for USAID engagement with FBOs for HIV/AIDS work needed.

ⁱ *The LIFE Initiative: Proposed Joint USAID-USDHHS-USDOD Operating Plan.* Section IVB., p.14.