



The Tripoli Declaration of Women Religious Leaders in the Arab States in Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

We, the Muslim and Christian women religious leaders in the field of AIDS in the Arab States, meeting in Tripoli (Libya) from the 4-7 Gumada Al-Awal 1427 H, 28-31 May 2006 as part of an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme and its HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States (HARPAS), hosted by the NGO "Wattassimo for Charity": Declare our endorsement of the Cairo Declaration for Religious Leaders*, and affirm that women religious leaders are enjoying a considerable degree of awareness of the threat of HIV/AIDS and we have committed to increasing awareness of its underlying causes and of its destruction of our societies. Thus, we will focus in this Declaration on issues related to both women and children, in view of their vulnerability to HIV infection in our Arab societies, and we have agreed the following:

First: To protect women from HIV infection by:

- Advocating the importance of the implementation of religious laws to facilitate prevention, protection and treatment of HIV/AIDS
- Promoting woman's right to protect themselves from HIV infection
- Working on putting an end to all forms of confiscation of the self-evident God-given right of women to choose or refuse situations that might expose them to HIV infection
- Promoting and reinforcing women's psychological, economic and social status to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection
- Ensuring women's right to legitimate and safe sexual relations
- Advocating the enactment and implementation of laws that protect women from sexual abuse and exploitation
- Emphasizing the importance of reaching out to vulnerable groups; especially commercial sex workers and drug users, and advocating the importance of designing up-to-date programmes based on our cultures, traditions and religious values to help in rehabilitating and protecting these vulnerable groups
- Calling upon the media to abide by ethical codes regarding the material they present and to avoid misuse of images of women in commercials, video clips, T.V serials and superficial movies, and encouraging the media to promote virtue
- Denouncing of all forms of violence against women along with harmful customs and traditions that contradict religious laws, and fostering a culture that encourages dialogue within the family
- Asserting women's right to benefit from health services and information related to HIV
- Appealing to governments and civil society to facilitate access to free medication for women living with HIV/AIDS and to establish a regional fund to help these women and all those affected by it
- Organizing awareness campaigns aimed at providing precautionary information to both medical and non-medical institutions regarding use of equipment that may transmit the virus
- Improving women's status during conflicts and migration, and in refugee and internal displacement situations
- Urging concerned Arab, African and Asian authorities to hold scientific workshops to ascertain the true causes of the spread of the epidemic, to find solutions, and to encourage scientific research on other issues related to HIV
- Preparing comprehensive programmes to combat poverty in our countries and transform needy families into independent and productive ones; as well as encouraging wealthier States to support and fund HIV/AIDS projects in poorer states
- Establishing and activating funds to support young people who want to get married

Second: To protect children from HIV infection by:

- Protecting children from the sex trade and taking all available media, educational, economic and legal measures to prevent such practices
- Advocating the development and implementation of a law dealing with the sexual abuse of children
- Emphasizing the importance of age-conscious sex education in school curricula in order to protect children from HIV infection
- Emphasizing the importance of enacting and implementing laws that forbid child labor under all circumstances, as it may lead to severe consequences, including HIV infection
- Addressing issues related to street children, homeless children and orphans
- Putting an end to the genital mutilation of young girls and the associated psychological and physical damage (which includes the possibility of exposure to HIV infection)
- Improving the match between the content of school curricula and the requirements of the labor market to empower young people and help them avoid unemployment
- Instituting developmental projects that address unemployment and help fill the free time of young people, girls and women, and especially the right of girls and women to take part in activities such as sports and related activities.