

interact

The magazine of **PROGRESSIO**
CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES



Faith

and HIV + AIDS

Also in this issue:
Crisis in Zimbabwe
Justice for Timor Leste
Young people in Nicaragua



editorial

Faith and HIV + AIDS

In May 2008, leaders from nearly 60 European and Latin American countries gathered in Lima, Peru, for an official Summit ostensibly looking at poverty, inequality, and inclusion; and sustainable development (climate change, environment, energy).

As our news story on page 5 suggests, few people at the grassroots level hold out much hope for positive outcomes for them from the official Summit. Meanwhile, an alternative People's Summit was held – 'a place where you can hear the voices which have ended up being silent because nobody listens to them,' according to Progressio development worker Diana Torres.

Those voices – the stories of the unheard people, of their work and their achievements – are what *Interact* tries to bring you. In this issue of *Interact*, many of the stories are about HIV and AIDS. The insight section looks in particular at the role of the Church and of faith leaders in tackling HIV and AIDS. The articles show how people at the grassroots – including progressive priests – are taking a lead in Latin America; but also show the impact that enlightened leaders, such as the *imams* in Somaliland and Yemen, can make.

The lesson perhaps is that everyone, so long as they are committed to bringing about real change, can make a difference. As Diana Torres said of the People's Summit in Lima: 'Here in this summit, you can see that there are people who are really fighting and achieving important things – and that's encouraging.'

Cover picture: Young people at an event organised by Progressio partner organisation SOCSA (the Somaliland Culture and Sports Association). Photo: Nick Sireau/Progressio

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Giving hope to the hopeless

IT WAS AROUND MIDDAY when, accompanied by two colleagues from Progressio partner organisation Talowadag, I arrived at a compound in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. I was taken to a makeshift shanty house where I found a helpless and broken-hearted woman. She was lying in bed, covered with a bed sheet that was crying out for a wash. My relaxed mood vanished as I stood stunned and shocked, not believing what I was seeing.

Unfortunately, family members, neighbours and friends, whom you would have expected to show sympathy and help this lady, had turned their backs and a blind eye. They were unconcerned, as if they were not aware of her appalling situation.

With a lot of difficulty, the woman – who seemed to have given up all hopes of life, as if waiting to pick her permanent address in the graveyard – narrated her sad predicament. It all started when her relatives chased her away because she was HIV positive. It was considered that she had committed an unforgivable sin and that she was an architect of her own misfortunes. From then on, she found herself and her children discriminated against, rejected and neglected by society.

As she spoke, her two children, a girl aged 8 and a boy aged 6, who are her care-takers and the family's main source of income, listened attentively. The children told me that they beg for money on the streets and the little they receive is what they depend on for survival. They could not go to school because they had no money to pay for school fees, but even if they had money they still could not go because there was no-one around to take care of their suffering, beloved mother.

After consultations with other people, myself and my Talowadag colleagues (a Board member and a home-based care officer) managed to persuade the woman's family members to welcome her back into their arms. We introduced her to a Talowadag support group for people living with HIV and AIDS. She decided to get counselling, picking up the courage to face the realities of life and accepting that she had been infected with HIV. Since then she has been living with high hopes and is not ready to give up simply because she is infected with HIV. The lady is working on an income-generating scheme which enables her to get money to buy food for the family. She says: 'Someone living with HIV is not a different human being. She can work

and earn her living just like others.'

The scenario this woman faced before Talowadag's intervention is a sad testimony to how those living with HIV and AIDS are associated with all the social negatives. It shows how they are stigmatised and treated with contempt and derision. The suffering also affects their innocent, humble and helpless children, in all economic and social dimensions.

In order to rectify the situation, the public has to be enlightened and sensitised. For the time being, those who can help in one way or another should come forward and help. We must all play our part. This includes our families, our friends, our schools, our mosques, churches and temples and within our community.

In particular, our attitudes about those most at risk from HIV must be free of negative perceptions and stigma. The fear of discrimination creates barriers. Many individuals may not get to know their HIV status out of fear of being rejected. We must pledge to continue to work together to educate, motivate and mobilise communities and the public and private sectors in the fight against stigma related to HIV and AIDS.

Mary Chigumira is a Progressio development worker with Talowadag, a women's coalition working on preventative strategies and the care of people living with HIV and AIDS in Somaliland. See page 13 for more on Talowadag.

Terminator is still a 'latent threat'

THE MEETING of the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in May saw no change to the moratorium on Terminator seeds, writes *Progressio* campaigns officer Brie O'Keefe.



Progressio's delegation at the CBD meeting also successfully lobbied, along with the governments of Peru and Indonesia, for seed saving rights and practices to be acknowledged and protected in the actual text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This creates a strong political imperative for all signatories to respect the rights of indigenous groups to save and cultivate local seed varieties and resist large-scale commercial agriculture.

However, other sinister environmental threats are looming, according to *Progressio* policy officer Sol Oyuela. 'At the international level, the short-term

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Read *Progressio's* briefing on the outcomes of the CBD meeting at www.progressio.org.uk

interests of profit hungry big businesses continue to take precedence over long-term, sustainable solutions to world hunger, poverty and climate change,' she says. 'Terminator seeds have become a latent threat within other controversial issues such as genetically engineered trees and agro-fuels.'

These technologies, presented as easy solutions to climate change, can act as 'Trojan horses' for Terminator technology, providing a practical application for the genetic modification. Environmental organisations and the governments of many developed and developing countries have real concerns about these 'solutions', for they fear these to be short-term fixes that eventually worsen climate change, and that will have devastating consequences for both poverty and the environment.

Progressio's campaign against Terminator helped ensure that the CBD moratorium remained in place, but although the campaign is now winding down, *Progressio* will continue to monitor developments in Terminator technology and threats to the practice of seed saving around the developing world. See page 17 for more on *Progressio's* campaign against Terminator technology.

Bishops call for end to 'circle of violence' in Zimbabwe

ZAMBIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS have urged leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to take 'much stronger action' to quell the escalating unrest in Zimbabwe.

In a pastoral statement issued in the Zambian capital Lusaka last week, 11 bishops said free and fair elections could not be held in Zimbabwe's current atmosphere of 'intimidation, torture and abductions'.

The bishops made a direct appeal to regional leaders to speak out in favour of a 'settlement of peace and justice' as Zimbabweans face an 'extremely volatile political situation, harsh economic conditions and untold misery as a result of physical abuse.'

'When we hear of so many casualties from violence, especially in poor rural areas, then we know that the rule of law has broken down,' the statement says, adding that the next Zimbabwean President's first commitment must be to 'restore the law and order that protects the poor and defenceless'. See page 18 for further analysis of the situation in Zimbabwe.

Progressio AGM

FERNANDA BORGES MP, an inspiring new-generation parliamentarian from the National Parliament of Timor Leste, will be guest speaker at *Progressio's* 2008 AGM. The AGM will be held in London on Tuesday 14 October 2008 at 6pm, with our guest speaker speaking at 7pm. All are welcome. Venue and ticket details will be confirmed soon. Fernanda Borges chairs the committee responsible for ensuring that the recommendations of the Timor Leste Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CAVR) report are discussed by the Parliament and that real change results. The CAVR report is central to the cry for justice of this young nation, and *Progressio* is launching a new campaign for justice for Timor Leste to support this process. See page 17 for more on this and look out on our website for updates on the AGM venue.

Trustees sought for Progressio Board

WE'RE LOOKING for up to four trustees over the next two years to join our Board. If you're passionate, enthusiastic and committed to the kind of work that you read about in *Interact*, then we'd like to hear from you.

We are particularly looking for trustees with experience in any of the following areas: monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, finance, and knowledge of Africa/Middle East or Timor Leste. Bringing the perspective of people from the South would be an added bonus.

Applicants should have a good personal or professional knowledge of international development, be proven decision-makers with

excellent communication skills, and be willing to bring their strategic thinking and particular expertise to Board meetings and other events.

Progressio works with people of all faiths and none, and this is reflected in the Board – no faith background is required for these trustee posts. *Progressio* particularly welcomes people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

If you are interested, please send a CV and a short letter expressing your interest to Clare Smedley at *Progressio* (or by email at clares@progressio.org.uk) by 15 July 2008. You can also find out more about us from our website www.progressio.org.uk, including a job description for our trustees.

Worlds apart

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS in Latin America have criticised the final declaration of the 5th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean held in Lima, Peru, in May, writes *Progressio development worker Michelle Lowe*.

They say the document contains fine words about poverty eradication, social cohesion and climate change but few clear targets or action plans. Meanwhile they note that the declaration states that the participants in the Summit agree to 'actively pursue the negotiations of Association Agreements [which include free trade agreements] as common strategic objectives of very high political priority'.

Prior to the official summit, an alternative People's Summit was held to allow other voices to be heard and offer alternatives and solutions. *Progressio development*

worker Diana Torres, who attended the People's Summit, said: 'This summit is a place where you can hear the voices which have ended up being silent because nobody listens to them.'

'It is obvious that people have a desperate need to express themselves. When the presentations finish, people don't have questions, what they need is to be listened to. It makes you reflect on people's grave lack of opportunities to participate and have a voice when, as soon as there is an opportunity to speak, people need to talk and talk and tell what is happening to them and how it is happening.'

Diana said she felt a mix of great satisfaction at the People's Summit – as an opportunity for people to talk and be heard and learn from each other – and deep dissatisfaction at the lack of real dialogue between the governments in the official



Michelle Lowe/Progressio
Progressio development worker Diana Torres.

Summit and the people:

'I think the official Summit responds to the needs of a specific economic model and so the proposals for solutions and any achievements they make are going to respond to that model – and by that I mean that they are not going to resolve the gap between rich and poor. They are working within the perspective of an economic model which continues to fragment society, making the poorest poorer and the richest richer.'

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Read more about the EU/LAC Summit and the alternative People's Summit at Michelle's weblog at www.michelleintheandes.blogspot.com

Religious leaders in Somaliland speak out on HIV and AIDS

RELIGIOUS LEADERS from across Somaliland met at a conference in May, hosted by *Progressio* and our partner organisation the Somaliland National AIDS Commission, to discuss how best they can respond to the growing HIV and AIDS epidemic, writes *David Tanner*.

At the conference – the first of its kind in Somaliland – the Minister for Religious Affairs and Endowment, Sheikh Mahmoud Sufi, said Somaliland's religious leaders can play a key role in helping to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS: 'Today I have a message to the religious leaders gathered here, and my message relates to Islam. As religious leaders in Somaliland you are responsible for your communities and you must help them avoid any form of harm to themselves, loss of human lives, or HIV infection.'

The conference drew on the

2004 'Cairo Declaration of Religious Leaders in Arab States in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic' which has encouraged many in the Islamic world to open up and discuss what were previously considered taboo subjects. The declaration goes beyond addressing HIV and AIDS issues alone by touching on wider development and social issues, for example by calling for greater empowerment and decision-making for Islamic women to reduce their vulnerability to the disease.

Progressio development worker Dr Abdurahman Mohamed Abdullahi and *Progressio partner organisations SAHAN and Talowadag* updated conference participants on the HIV and AIDS situation in the country and Horn of Africa region, the main methods of transmission, the continuing low levels of awareness amongst the



Caroline Pankhurst/Progressio

general population regarding the disease, and the plight and problems faced by those already living with HIV and AIDS.

At the end of the conference the religious leaders agreed a joint declaration and committed to form a council to bring them together on a formal and regular basis to help address HIV and AIDS in the country.

David Tanner is Progressio's programme coordinator for Africa. See page 13 for more on HIV and AIDS in Somaliland.

We need to look beyond technological quick-fixes if we are to find long-term, sustainable solutions to the problems the world faces, writes **Christine Allen**



agenda

Moral imperative

WITH THE WORLD IN THE GRIP of a major food crisis, it is worth reflecting on the success of Progressio's campaign against Terminator – a seed technology that, we argued, would have put the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, and the food security of many millions of people, at risk.

Our campaign sought to ensure that the ban on Terminator remained in place. Despite fears that the biotech industry was going to push for the ban to be overturned, the recent meeting of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity kept the ban in place (see page 17 for more details). As the world is now also realising with regard to biofuels, there are dangers in pinning our hopes on short-term, technological, quick-fix

answers without fully assessing the impact on the environment and particularly on the lives of those who are poorest.

The food crisis has quite rightly dominated the media. At a time of crisis there is a danger that people will too readily seek out quick-fix answers. But when looking for answers to the problem of feeding a growing global population that seeks to consume more and more, we have to consider the full nature of the consequences of any course of action.

In the Terminator campaign, it was sobering listening to the voices and experiences of poor farmers who are finding ways to feed their families and communities, often in the face of a push



Graham Freer/Progressio

to industrialise food production. Clearly the world's food needs require large-scale production to some extent, but this must never be at the cost of small-scale producers. The model of agro-ecology, which Progressio has highlighted in the past, demonstrates that food production can be sustainable, and be done in a way that cares for the earth, while also meeting people's food needs.

There will never be one single answer, there has to be a range of answers. Putting the producers, especially the poor producers, into the equation is something that makes sense. It is also, for us, a moral imperative, that we listen to the concerns of those who are poorest.

At the heart of the food and fuel crises there is a conundrum for us in the rich North in particular: that of our lifestyle and consumption patterns. That's one reason why Progressio has been supporting the *livesimply* challenge, in order to help people reflect on their own choices and potential for being part of change in the face of such vast problems. *Livesimply* is moving into a second stage now, finding ways in which people make promises alongside others, in groups, networks or communities – even as a family – that will not only reflect a desire for social change but a commitment to take practical actions as a result.

As *livesimply* argues, by showing our commitment to and solidarity with the world's poor, we are demonstrating our support for long-term, sustainable solutions that put the concerns of those who are poorest at the forefront.

Christine Allen is Progressio's executive director.

Life-giving responses

This edition of *Interact* focuses on the issue of HIV and, in particular, reflects on the experience and responses of churches and faith-based organisations. Few organisations have the scale, reach and influence that faith groups have in relation to HIV. Whilst there are still challenges around really addressing gender injustice, stigma and prevention, the work and contribution of faith communities must be applauded. As you will read, the engagement is real and goes to the heart of what is needed to change behaviour.

It's not just about the mechanics of one form of prevention over another, but about the ways in which the fundamental value of all human beings can be cherished and supported – particularly those who are powerless in the face of violence to have any sort of control over their lives (structural, society-wide discrimination and marginalisation, as well as domestic and sexual violence). It is this context that we cannot ignore in addressing the pandemic.

Many people working in grassroots situations are people of faith who are grappling with these issues and the clash of values they represent. One way to support them is to highlight the thinking and theology that underpins these central questions. That's why Progressio is working (with a team of theologians) on producing theological reflections on HIV and AIDS which will be published later on in the year. It's an initiative which takes inspiration from the words of Bishop Kevin Dowling, who was our AGM speaker a few years ago. He said:

'Theology, in the context of AIDS, must reflect on the living and real situation of people. This should lead us to humbly recognise that at times we do not have all, or even some of the answers; that we must *search* for life-giving responses with our God present in the human condition.'

It's a tough challenge, but one never more so needed.

ON OUR SIDE

Influencing the Catholic Church from the grassroots up is a key part of a Peruvian organisation's strategy to tackle HIV and AIDS, writes **Michelle Lowe**

There is a lot of fear within the Church about working on HIV, but there is also growing awareness of the importance of the issue. Our view is that we have to get involved,' says Lourdes Ninapayta, coordinator of Casas de la Salud (Healthcare Homes) in Peru.

Casas de la Salud is an NGO led by a Catholic priest and is based in the Peruvian coastal town of Ica (south of Lima). It works with an urban population of 60,000 of the poorest people in three Catholic parishes in the Ica region. They have projects tackling a wide range of health issues including TB, HIV and malnutrition, and they also run environmental programmes.

The organisation began working on HIV in 2000, with the support of a Progreso development worker. They took on this work because they felt they had to address a growing



Lourdes Ninapayta (right) with a colleague at Casas de la Salud.

and urgent need in their parishes, and their HIV work takes a grassroots approach which puts Catholic social teaching into practice on a daily basis. Lourdes explains:

'Our way of working is based in the reality of people's lives. That is the big failing in a lot of work the Church does – not

recognising the community's reality. Our approach is to ask, how can we work together to support each other?'

Building alliances

In order to influence the Catholic Church on HIV, Casas de la Salud aims to build alliances with like-minded local priests, and educate those priests and bishops who are more resistant to their work. Lourdes says:

'We work with José Manuel Miranda [a priest who is helping to coordinate Casas de la Salud's HIV work] and with other priests who are open to working on HIV – those who have a different way of looking at the issue and want to work on social change.

'Together with José Manuel, we slowly but surely showed the previous Bishop the scale of the problem and the need to work on it – so that he allowed us to get on with our work. He didn't publicly support it, but he didn't present obstacles either.' [continued overleaf]

Working with PLWHA

Casas de la Salud trains volunteer 'accompaniers' who offer emotional and practical support to people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA), and provides training for PLWHA to create their own organisations. In the past five years they have built up the numbers of PLWHA involved in the project from a handful to over 50 people. The people involved have now set up a variety of active groups including a women's group and a young people's group. These groups have empowered PLWHA to have a voice in the media, organise informational events and monitor service-provision in hospitals and health centres.

Casas de la Salud aims to respond to the priorities of these groups. For example, although antiretroviral treatment is now free in Peru, other costs such as tests, medication for side effects and travelling to hospital can be prohibitively high for people with low incomes. The organisation has started a programme to help PLWHA to set up and run small enterprises such as yoghurt production and guinea pig rearing to generate income.

Prevention work with young people

Young people are a key target group for prevention work in Peru, as Health Ministry statistics show that in the last decade 50% of all new infections have occurred amongst the under-30s, with a probable average age of infection of around 20 years.

Casas de la Salud uses a range of strategies to reach teenagers including radio programmes, internet café messages, peer education and working with parents. 'We work on prevention from different perspectives,' says Bertha Muñoz. 'We have games, videos, fairs, trips and other activities, to break the ice and to get conversations going – to enter into the topic of sexuality. If you don't use these types of activities, it is impossible to talk about the topic.'

Positive results

Although Casas de la Salud has faced resistance from some conservative sectors of the Church, their gradual 'bottom-up' approach to advocacy has shown positive results, as Bertha Muñoz, Casas de la Salud's HIV and AIDS training manager, explains:

'There was a priest in Ica who was very against working on HIV openly. We were running prevention workshops with young people – including modules on masturbation, sexual education and condom use – and he wrote a letter to the Bishop saying that as part of the Church we shouldn't do that work.'

'However, two or three months later, he had a problem in his parish with a group of young people. One of them had had contact with someone living with HIV and then had sexual relations with the other young people. They came to him for support and he was very concerned and didn't know what to do, so he came to us for help.'

'We ran workshops with them including one on condom use. In the work that we did, it transpired that there hadn't actually been sexual contact – it was all gossip and rumours. But the priest realised that he was wrong in his previous judgment and that sending the letter had been an error. He is now on our side.'

Casas de la Salud's approach to prevention work may be controversial with more conservative sectors of the church, but they say the proof is in the results: their work with young people has been so effective that other organisations and even another priest have asked to reproduce their materials and techniques.

Popular support

All of this work is having a very positive impact at the local level, as well as helping to get HIV onto the regional government's agenda. However, they are very aware that there is also an urgent need to influence the hierarchy of the Church. There is a new Bishop in their Diocese, whom they feared might oppose and clamp down on their work.

Fortunately he appears to be supportive of their work, but Lourdes says:

'We are very conscious of the fact that changes in the Church hierarchy, such as a new Bishop, could heavily impact the work we do. There is a real need for advocacy aimed at the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. As the Church, we cannot keep up the old ways of viewing this issue. We have to risk changing.'

Despite the risk of opposition from conservative sectors of the church, Lourdes and her team know that the success of the organisation's work in local communities means that they count on huge popular support:

'If another new Bishop were to come and try to shut us down, the population wouldn't keep quiet about it. Our big strength is that we have the support of 80% of the population because we are really working to address their needs. If the institution were threatened, people living with HIV and AIDS and the wider community would defend it because it is their organisation.'

Michelle Lowe is a Progressio development worker working on advocacy and communications in Peru and Ecuador. From 1999 to 2003 a Progressio development worker, Doctor Ana Teresa Rodriguez, worked with Casas de la Salud, developing their HIV work. Progressio is now looking to continue supporting the organisation.

Lourdes Ninapayta (left) and Bertha Muñoz.



In Peru and Ecuador, as in many other regions of the world, there is a huge difference between the response of the Church hierarchy to HIV and AIDS and the grassroots responses of dedicated priests, nuns, social pastorals (diocesan bodies which carry out the pastoral work of the Church) and congregations. At a local level, the Church has often been the first and most committed agency in responding to the epidemic. In both countries there is still a strong influence of liberation theology and voices at a range of levels within the Church are pushing for change.

Interviews by Michelle Lowe

DIVERSE RESPONSES, DIVERSE CHALLENGES

Roberto Narvaez

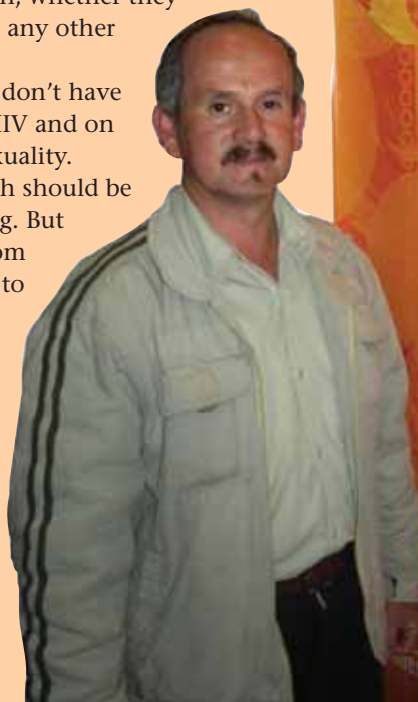
Roberto Narvaez is coordinator of the Cuenca Social Pastoral, a Progressio partner organisation in Ecuador. The Cuenca Social Pastoral runs an HIV programme. In March this year, they organised an ecumenical meeting to bring together churches from across Latin America to discuss religious responses to the HIV crisis. Religious leaders from eight countries in the region presented their experiences to an audience of around 60 representatives from churches and faith-based and social organisations including Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, Methodist, Baptist, and Evangelical churches.

'We organised the meeting because the widely-available HIV and AIDS information tends to come from civil society, grassroots organisations and international NGOs, and we feel that condom use is promoted very heavily as the central theme. As a result, we wanted to clarify our position as the [Catholic] Church and as churches.

'We, as the social pastoral, work on HIV and AIDS from a holistic perspective which includes prevention, care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). Our focus is on the person. And by "the person" we mean any person, whether they are homosexual or heterosexual, or from any other group – we don't distinguish.

'Anybody is vulnerable to HIV if they don't have sufficient information and training on HIV and on living with love and living with their sexuality. Condom use is one of the methods which should be included in this information and training. But what we don't want to promote is condom use as *the* prevention method – we want to educate people on the wide range of methods available. For example, from a Christian ethical perspective, we promote mutual fidelity and we also talk about abstinence, especially with young people.

'The question is often, "does the Church *allow*...or not allow?". We don't want to limit ourselves to that. Our view is that the Church *promotes* people's health and right to integrity and dignity.'



Michelle Lowe/Progressio



Julio César Cruz and Jesús Culis

Julio César Cruz (second from right) is executive director and Jesús Culis (second from left) is services coordinator of Progressio partner organisation PROSA in Lima, Peru. PROSA is run by and for people living with HIV and AIDS.

They are pictured with Progressio development workers Ana Teresa Rodriguez (right) and Susana Araujo (left) who worked with PROSA in 2005/6.

Julio: 'In Peru, the influence of the Church on the state has been very strong – especially concerning family planning and condoms and in relation to HIV.

'The Church operates in two distinct ways at two different levels. Firstly it operates at the level

of political power, in alliance with the state. The HIV work done by the Church at this level is focused on support and solidarity: on the care of people with AIDS, but not on any prevention work at all. At the other level, on the ground, there are a few priests who are working very actively on prevention – promoting condom use and working with young people on protecting themselves.'

Jesus: 'The problem with the Catholic Church here is that it is very conservative – with lots of Opus Dei bishops who are the most conservative of all. Having said that, the Catholic Church is now less openly prejudiced than it was.

'In the past, there were some isolated examples of more open-minded priests – for example one who was doing very positive work with a transsexual group. But we also heard lots of accounts of priests in other hospitals being very discriminatory: saying for example that gay men had contracted HIV because of living a bad life; that God made us to be together as man and woman; gay men were going to hell and HIV was a punishment. That was maybe eight years ago and it seems to be happening less now.'

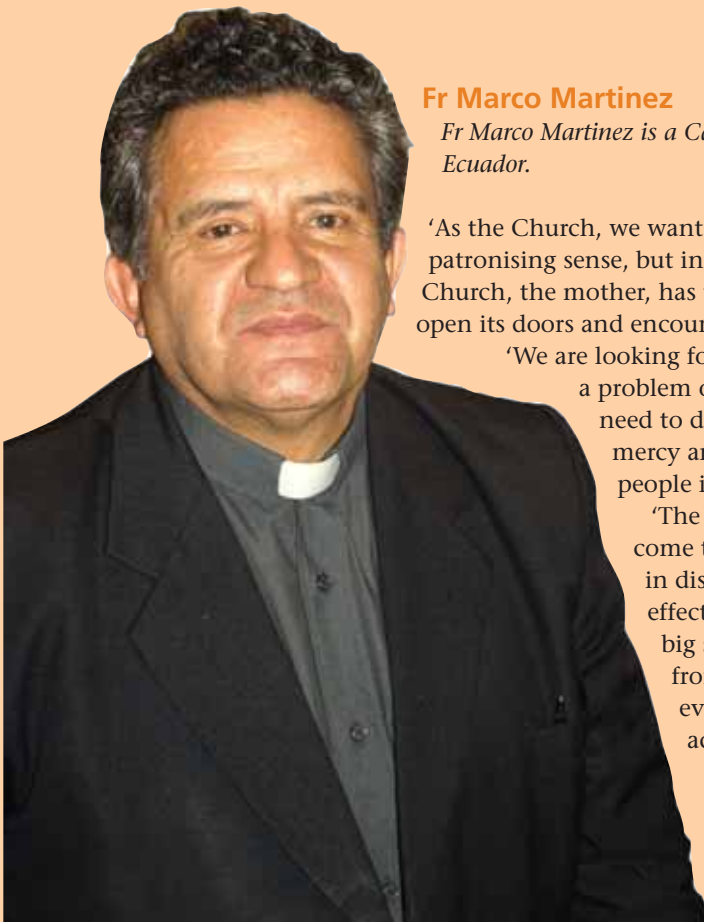
Fr Marco Martinez

Fr Marco Martinez is a Catholic priest working with the Cuenca Social Pastoral in Ecuador.

'As the Church, we want to base our work on HIV on compassion. Not in a patronising sense, but in the sense of sharing and feeling another's pain. The Church, the mother, has to enter into dialogue, educate itself and educate others, open its doors and encourage people to get involved.

'We are looking for a way of getting people to understand that it is not just a problem of AIDS, there are all the social consequences as well. We need to deal with all of these issues – the whole panorama, with mercy and calmness. We need to put our hearts beside those of people in misery.

'The Church, and by the Church I mean all of us, should come to an agreement in order to be effective and not lose time in discussions on doctrine, but instead try to produce an effective response to the pandemic. And the Church *is* taking big steps forward. There are very encouraging words coming from the Vatican and from the Episcopal Conference and even though it is often quiet, hidden work, it is work that is advancing.'



Ana Maria Rosasco Dulanto

Ana Maria Rosasco Dulanto is coordinator for training and community participation for the Health, Sexuality and Human Development Unit at Cayetano Heredia University's School of Public Health and Administration, Lima, Peru.

'In Peru, the influence of the Catholic Church on the government now isn't as strong as it was under President Toledo when we had two very conservative health ministers who saw non-governmental organisations as enemies.

'Although the influence of the Church is now not as pronounced, it is still there in a veiled way – for example on issues such as the emergency contraceptive pill and abortion. There are powerful Opus Dei influences in the Congress – they recently blocked the passage of a bill protecting against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The problem is that we don't have a secular state and until we do, there will always be problems. For example, a sexual education training programme for teachers was designed but then it was vetoed by the hierarchy of the Church and had to be redrafted.

'At a grassroots level, the Catholic Church first began to really work with people living with HIV and AIDS in 1991-92. Several foreign priests and nuns have done some good work including support schemes, setting up pastoral groups in communities to try to tackle discrimination and mistreatment, prevention work and care for terminally ill patients and AIDS orphans.'

Sr Carmen Carrasco

Sister Carmen Carrasco is a nun with the Madres Adoratrices in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The Madres Adoratrices run HIV prevention programmes as part of their projects to care for sex workers in various cities in Latin America including in four cities in Ecuador.

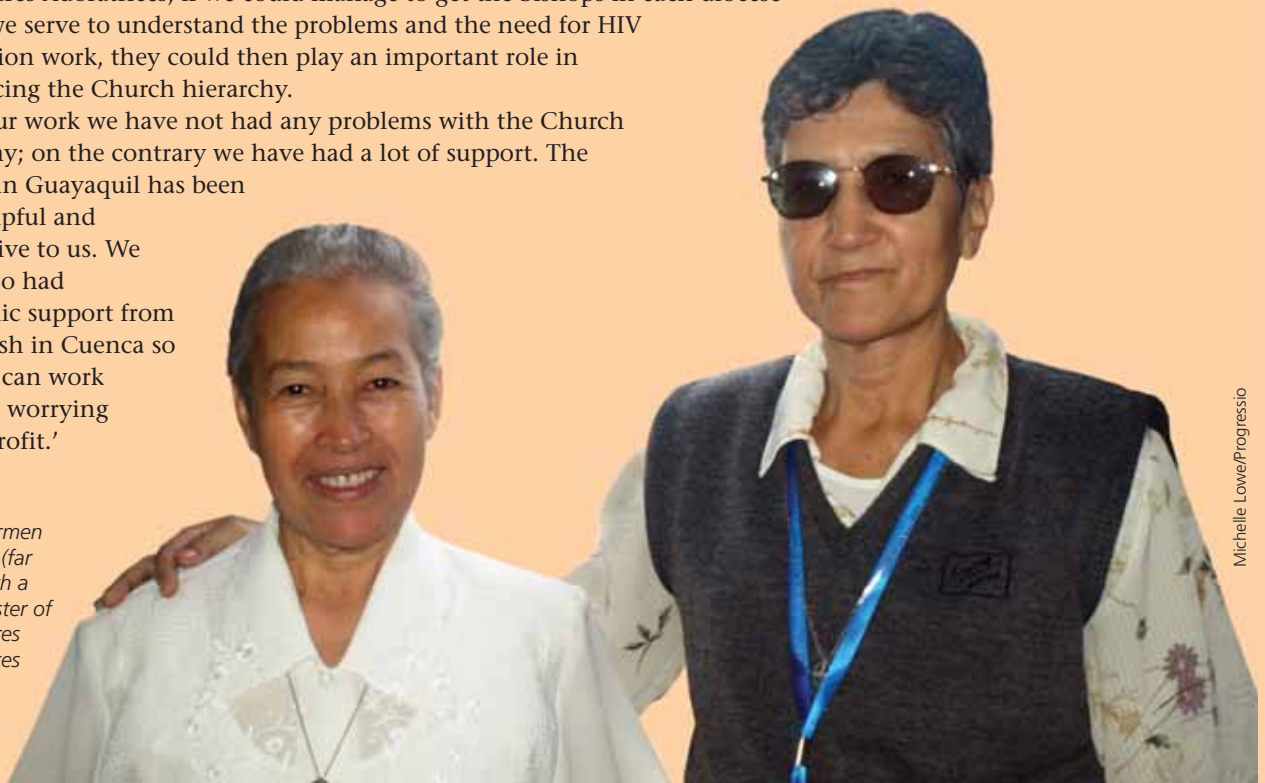
'All of us, whether we are HIV positive or not, are children of God and we are loved by God. We are children of God because he loves us and will not marginalise us – so why are we marginalising HIV positive people?

'I think that the Church, especially the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, needs to think about which Jesus we are preaching and teaching about. When he came he said that he came to look after for those who were lost, those who were hurt and those who were rejected. If I don't feel like I am part of the rejected, the hurt and the lost, that means I am outside what Jesus wanted. If I don't even want to accept that there are people who are lost, I am the first to be outside what Jesus wanted.

'In that sense, I think the Church needs to have a very serious internal reflection about our response to the HIV epidemic – starting with the hierarchy. In our case, as the Madres Adoratrices, if we could manage to get the bishops in each diocese where we serve to understand the problems and the need for HIV prevention work, they could then play an important role in influencing the Church hierarchy.

'In our work we have not had any problems with the Church hierarchy; on the contrary we have had a lot of support. The Bishop in Guayaquil has been very helpful and supportive to us. We have also had economic support from the parish in Cuenca so that we can work without worrying about profit.'

Sister Carmen Carrasco (far right) with a fellow Sister of the Madres Adoratrices



Michelle Lowe/Progressio



Irfan Akhtar/Progressio

Sheikh Jabri Hasan Ibrahim at the workshop.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Islamic religious leaders in Yemen are playing a key role in raising awareness about HIV and AIDS, writes **Irfan Akhtar**

‘Our religious duty is to prevent this disease from spreading among the people and to reduce the stigma against people living with HIV and AIDS.’ These words may not seem controversial, until one realises they were spoken by an *imam* of a mosque in Yemen.

Sheikh Abdul-Wali al-Qadasi, imam of the al-Faniah mosque in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, went on to say: ‘Islam teaches us to respect other people’s rights, including those people infected with HIV. I hope to meet people living with this disease and to help guide them to a shining future.’

Sheikh Abdul-Wali al-Qadasi was speaking at a training workshop for religious preachers (imams and *khateeb*s) and female religious guides (*murshidat*) organised by Progressio and our Yemeni partner organisation, the Interaction in Development Foundation. The workshop – following on from the model of similar, successful workshops held by Progressio – aimed to increase the religious leaders’ knowledge of HIV and AIDS and promote the positive role they can play in reducing

stigma and discrimination.

‘Mosques and religious leaders have a strong position in the hearts of Yemeni people,’ said Sheikh Jabri Hasan Ibrahim, a well-known religious figure in Yemen and one of the workshop facilitators. Religious leaders are therefore well placed to help spread awareness about HIV and AIDS in this fiercely traditional society. They have easy access to the people and many opportunities to talk to them and discuss issues within the ethical framework provided by their religion.

In his workshop session on stigma and discrimination, Sheikh Jabri Hasan Ibrahim talked about HIV and AIDS from an Islamic perspective, using many references from the Qu’ran and the Hadith (oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the prophet Mohammed) to highlight Islamic teaching on avoiding high risk behaviours and dealing with people living with the disease.

In the session, the initial view of many of the participants was that AIDS is a punishment for those who are not following the religious teachings. The ensuing debate revealed a wider perspective, however, including the ideas that AIDS is a test from Allah of human beings’ patience; that this test is a gift from Allah and

not an ordeal or trial; that in Allah’s eyes there is no difference between healthy and sick people; that AIDS is a disease like other diseases; that Allah has damned the sin itself, not the sinners.

After further discussion, participants at the workshop agreed that they as Muslims should respect the dignity and humanity of people living with HIV and AIDS, who should be given care and support as Islam is the religion of love and peace.

‘We are reluctant to talk about HIV and AIDS as it deals with sex and sexuality,’ said Sheikh Jabri Hasan Ibrahim. ‘But in Islam, sex and sexuality is also described in a scientific and healthy manner.’ People living with HIV and AIDS, he said, are in more need of love, passion, care and support to live healthily.

At the end of the session, the male preachers and female religious guides were asked to write a prototype sermon (*khutba*) on HIV and AIDS, based on the knowledge and understanding gained in the workshop. These were then discussed the following morning, and participants also received sermon materials prepared by Sheikh Jabri Hasan Ibrahim and guidelines on HIV and AIDS from the National AIDS Programme. Most of the imams subsequently delivered a sermon on HIV and AIDS in their mosques in Sana’a on World AIDS Day, bringing – as the workshop organisers hoped – their new awareness of HIV and AIDS and message of compassion and understanding to a wider audience.

Irfan Akhtar is a Progressio development worker in Yemen. The workshop described was held in October/November 2007 and was organised by Progressio and the Interaction in Development Foundation in coordination with the Sana’a local council and the National AIDS Programme.

A new people

A women's network in Somaliland has given people living with HIV and AIDS new hope, writes **Joanne Green**

When my doctor first diagnosed me with HIV and AIDS, he told me to take my mattress to the graveyard and wait to die,' explained a HIV and AIDS support group leader to a roomful of his peers. The response of uproarious laughter demonstrates the newfound confidence of these women and men living with HIV and AIDS. Now, thanks to Progressio partner organisation Talowadag, he and many others have accessed medical treatment from the hospital and receive care and encouragement from their support group. All nod in agreement as he says: 'though we have been rejected by our own people, we have found a new people.'

In Somaliland, people living with HIV

and AIDS face terrible stigma and discrimination. When their families discover one of them is HIV positive they throw them out of the family home to fend for themselves, even if – as is often the case – the woman was infected by her husband. But the impact is not just felt by those who are infected. Female support group leader Amran Assan Ahmed spoke about how her children can no longer go to school because they are bullied: 'The other children shouted at them and

threw stones, saying their mother has AIDS. They would run home and cry.'

All these people are here today because of the determination of three Somali women who overcame their own fears and meagre financial resources to found Talowadag – a network of three women's organisations providing care and support to those living with HIV and AIDS in Somaliland. The women were motivated to action by the suffering of people living with HIV and AIDS in their communities.

Progressio country director Adan Abokor saw their potential and decided to support the development of the nascent NGO. Last year Zimbabwean development worker Mary Chigumira arrived to work with them, and according to the Talowadag executive director Gulleid Osman Abdi she has already made a big impact.

Gulleid explained that Mary initiated the creation of the support groups and home-based care: 'Previously, we didn't know what home-based care was. If we hadn't had a development worker, we wouldn't have been able to support the 50 families we now support.'

Mary also organised a

'If we hadn't had a development worker, we wouldn't have been able to support the 50 families we now support'

Talowadag support group leader Amran Assan Ahmed (far right).

Joanne Green/Progressio

learning visit to Zanzibar for Talowadag staff as it is a Muslim area that has very good HIV and AIDS programmes. As a result of this visit Talowadag has strengthened its work with religious leaders and supports a group of Sheikhs who travel around the country in buses with loudspeakers, encouraging people not to keep silent about the disease and to come for voluntary testing. They promote compassion based on the teachings of Mohammed, speak out against discrimination and make visits to those affected. It sends a very powerful message to the community when religious leaders visit those living with HIV and AIDS.

Through their work, staff recognise that they themselves have been changed. As Gulleid recounted: 'It is not only the communities that have been helped but the activists as well. We began our work with one lady who lived in a shack, having been thrown out of her home by her family. We wanted to help her but were too scared to even go in and shake her hand. Today we live with people living with HIV and AIDS, we eat with them, we touch them. When others see this it sends a powerful signal to them.'

Joanne Green is Progressio's advocacy manager.

HIV and AIDS in Somaliland

IT IS ONLY IN THE LAST DECADE that the seriousness of the threat HIV and AIDS poses to Somaliland has been recognised, with programmes to address it beginning only recently and with very limited geographical coverage and engagement. The World Health Organisation estimates an HIV infection rate in Somaliland of 1.4%, an increase from an estimated 0.9% prevalence rate in 2002 (WHO 2004 HIV surveillance report – Region: North-West). In the busy port town of Berbera, where the movement of people is considerable and many commercial sex workers are based, infection rates have risen consistently: 0.0% in 1999, 2.3% in 2004 and 2.7% in 2007.

Somaliland's neighbours Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya have higher HIV infection rates of 2.9%, 4.4% and 6.1% respectively. Somaliland maintains close socio-economic links with these neighbouring countries and the rather porous borders encourage migration and exchange of people. Many Somalilanders seek employment in neighbouring countries, returning occasionally to visit family, and internally displaced people – particularly those fleeing the chaos in Somalia – enter Somaliland. Additionally, as Somaliland continues to develop economically, trade routes become increasingly busy and the

movement of truck drivers, sea farers and their passengers increases. There are therefore a considerable number of routes by which HIV can spread from higher prevalence countries into Somaliland.

Additionally there are cultural and societal factors that increase the risk that HIV infection, and the number of deaths associated with AIDS, will continue to rise. These include an overall low awareness level and a lack of access to information regarding the disease; an overriding perception that the risk of infection is negligible; widespread stigma against those living with the disease; low literacy levels (particularly amongst girls and women); poor access to health services; high levels of poverty; and lack of access and sensitivities regarding the use of condoms (all within a context where a commercial sex trade exists and engages in unsafe practices).

Additionally, women generally are particularly at increased risk due to practices such as wife inheritance, female genital mutilation, polygamy, marriage before the age of 15 and a lack of services and medication to help prevent mother-to-child transmission.

David Tanner, Progressio programme coordinator (Africa)

Progressio in Somaliland

Since 2001 Progressio-Somaliland has been working to address issues surrounding HIV and AIDS.

Progressio development workers have worked alongside local partners to help increase awareness regarding the disease and its prevention particularly among young people, people with disabilities, women's groups, those working in the media, the armed forces and religious leaders.

Progressio has also provided technical support to the Somaliland National AIDS Commission (SOLNAC) which was formed in late 2005 and is responsible for overseeing all HIV and AIDS activities in the country. A long-term partnership with Hargeisa hospital continues, with current development worker Dr Abdirahman Mohamed managing the training of staff in anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment for HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted disease programmes, voluntary counselling and testing, the production of information pamphlets, the provision of health education to patients, and the training of home-based carers, youth leaders and traditional healers.

Dr Abdirahman has also been offering close support and collaboration to Talowadag, along with development worker Mary Chigumira who is helping staff establish and implement programmes including the provision of funds to enable those living with HIV and AIDS – particularly women – to generate an income; the provision of food parcels; negotiating access to free ARV treatment and counselling services; establishing support groups and home-based care; and working with religious leaders to encourage the use of sermons to preach messages of tolerance and compassion for those living with the disease to help fight against stigmatisation.

David Tanner, Progressio programme coordinator (Africa)

Zimbabwe's food crisis presents an added challenge to female prisoners with children, writes **Teclah Ponde**

'ONE OF THE MOST PAINFUL CHALLENGES we are faced with is that small children in prison with their mothers do not have any food rations.

We end up sharing the small rations we have with our children. The other challenge we are faced with is that some of us are HIV positive but we don't have sufficient supplementary food to go with the medication.'

These are the complaints of female prisoners incarcerated in some of the correctional centres I have visited during my orientation programme with the Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO).

The harsh economic conditions faced in Zimbabwe and the challenges of obtaining even such basic commodities such as mealie meal, cooking oil, sugar and salt, have not only affected the general Zimbabwean populace but institutions such as correctional centres in particular. My first visit to Zimbabwean prisons was a revelation of how much the challenges faced by our country are magnified for offenders in correctional centres. Severe food shortages have intensified other challenges such as the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, and food-deficiency related illnesses such as pellagra.

Of particular concern are breast-feeding women, and women who have been imprisoned with babies too young to be left behind with relatives, or who

Innocent victims

have no relatives who are prepared to take over the burden of looking after their children during the mother's prison term. Women in these positions have no choice but to keep their children with them while they are in prison.

Legally, children can only stay within a correctional centre environment for up to three years but there have been cases where children have stayed for periods longer than the stipulated time. These children have therefore been forced to abide by the conditions faced by their incarcerated mothers and under severe challenges of inadequate nutrition.

Food rations in correctional centres are targeted at offenders only and any dependents that the offender is incarcerated with are not part of the ration allocations. As such, the mothers have to share their rations with their babies. Efforts are now being made by ZACRO and others to find ways in which the needs of these innocent victims of offending behaviour can be met.

Touched by the plight of these children, some of whose mothers are HIV positive, I approached a Christian non-governmental organisation called the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, seeking help with providing

supplementary food specifically for children, breast-feeding mothers and those who are living with HIV and already under anti-retroviral treatment. The organisation donated 31 boxes of supplementary food comprising a mixture of rice, soya and dried vegetables, as well as providing clothing for the children. The food is now being distributed to needy children and breast-feeding mothers. In

'Small children in prison with their mothers do not have any food rations. We end up sharing the small rations we have with our children'

some correctional centres, supplementary food has also been provided for offenders on medication.

Having realized the positive impact of this initial intervention, ZACRO continues to look for humanitarian assistance for the offenders housed in all the correctional centres in Zimbabwe. This will go a long way towards reducing the effects of incarceration for men, women and children in correctional centres.

Teclah Ponde is a Progressio development worker with ZACRO.

ZACRO's mission is to:

- advocate for justice as well as respect and protection of prisoners' rights
- facilitate re-integration of prisoners back into mainstream society after release from prison
- mobilise communities to fight crime in the country
- promote rehabilitation of offenders and ex-offenders to prevent re-offending behaviour
- seek further penal reform based on rehabilitative legislation and lobbying for Zimbabwean prisons to conform to international minimum standards of treating prisoners.



A child receiving a free school lunch provided by a UNICEF food aid scheme. The Zimbabwe food crisis means that many children of female prisoners are going hungry.

Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos



Caroline Pankhurst/Progressio

Young people relax on a day out at Laguna de Apoyo near Granada, Nicaragua.

The right to be confident

Strategies to defend the sexual and reproductive rights of women in Latin America must start from the reality of their experiences, writes **Jean Casey**

THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS emerged from a workshop with women, most of them young, who participated in Puntos de Encuentro 'camps' (where people came together to talk about Puntos de Encuentro's *Somos diferente, somos iguales* – 'We are different, we are the same' – communications strategy).

The women were clear that their actual experience of sexual and reproductive health matters must be the starting point for understanding and promoting their rights.

The emotional factors that affect a person's ability to defend and protect their sexual and reproductive rights must be taken into account. In that regard, doubts emerged about the effectiveness

of using the language of rights when talking about sexuality and reproduction. The women thought that, on its own, the language of rights lacked the experiential dimension needed to foster awareness of the issues among young women.

A good many of the young girls taking part were hearing this kind of discussion for the first time. The idea of having rights, as a way into talking about sexuality and reproduction, was difficult for many of them. This is because not only are the technical terms new to them, but they often lack basic information about preventive measures, for example the proper use of condoms and contraceptives, and self-care.

For them, it is essential that more

emphasis is placed on sexual and reproductive health, with detailed, practical training in self-care, before going on to the language of rights.

There was criticism that in focusing on sexual and reproductive rights, the emotional aspects were not being brought out. Feelings and self-confidence are an essential aspect of women's experience of exercising and defending their sexual and reproductive rights. In a *machista* society they feel pressured into having sex without the use of condoms or the ability to negotiate their use, and it is important that they have the confidence and self-esteem to say 'no'.

Another important point is that, even if women know they have the right to live without violence or abuse, it is difficult to leave an abusive relationship if they lack emotional support, self-esteem, allies and the confidence to leave such a relationship. The women said they lacked spaces where they could talk about their experience regarding their sexual and reproductive rights, and lacked support for their own emotional development.

These thoughts showed that for women, the emotional aspects – confidence and self-esteem – can be vehicles for becoming able to exercise

A good many of the young girls taking part were hearing this kind of discussion for the first time

sexual and reproductive rights.

In conclusion, the women felt that the route to working effectively on sexual and reproductive rights involves placing greater emphasis on prevention and practice – including the experiential and emotional dimension – before, armed with that knowledge and understanding, moving on to the politics of rights.

Without this practical basis, the theoretical dimension of rights does not adequately reflect their own experience and needs, and so does not on its own enable them to strengthen their position in society as social, economic and political subjects.

Jean Casey is a Progressio development worker with Puntos de Encuentro.

Puntos de Encuentro (Meeting Points)

Puntos de Encuentro produces the radio and television programmes *Sexto Sentido* (Sixth Sense) as a platform from which to take on and debate different themes such as sexual and reproductive rights, violence within the family, gender and sexual abuse, human rights, poverty, migration, social exclusion and drugs. Under the slogan 'We are different, we are the same', the organisation aims to explore these themes from a perspective of diversity, equity and non-discrimination.

The UGLY truth

Progressio's new campaign highlights the UK's role in the occupation and oppression of Timor Leste, writes **Brie O'Keefe**

NINE DAYS after declaring independence from Portugal in 1974, Timor Leste (East Timor) was invaded by Indonesia, marking the beginning of a bloody, repressive and violent occupation that would last for the next 25 years.

The Indonesian military forcibly displaced thousands of East Timorese from their homes and livelihoods and forbade them from leaving resettlement camps, despite lack of food or adequate hygiene facilities. All human and civil rights were suspended. Women were forced into marriages, raped or abused, often as retribution for being related to members of Fretilin. Pro-independence activists were persecuted, tortured or killed, and basic freedoms – such as freedom of speech, movement or association – were non-existent.

During this time, the world community, including the UK, turned a blind eye to the atrocities occurring in Timor Leste. Recently declassified documents from the 1970s show the UK

knew of atrocities and human rights abuses occurring within Timor Leste but made a conscious decision to ignore this and state publicly that they had no knowledge of any abuses to preserve stability and support Indonesia as a regional anti-communist power. More audaciously, as reports of human rights abuses trickled into British diplomatic missions in the region and were ignored, the British government made agreements for future arms sales to Indonesia: thereby tacitly supporting the occupation.

The UK has always maintained that it 'recognised Timor Leste's right to self-determination'. However, these documents show that in reality the UK and other world powers were never interested in supporting self-determination for Timor Leste and were more interested in supporting Indonesia's military occupation to further arms deals and make money. Despite successive United Nations Security Council resolutions condemning the occupation

as illegal, the United Kingdom remained silent.

In spite of all odds, a window of opportunity arose in 1999 for Timor Leste to break free from Indonesian rule. Since then, the nation has struggled to come to grips with its troubled past. While, in Indonesia, the military perpetrators of human rights violations rise through the ranks and obtain positions of political influence with no fear of prosecution, in Timor Leste the consequences of justice undelivered have fed a culture of enmity and violence between former political and ethnic rivals, leading to a spiral of violence which is preventing the country from moving towards a peaceful future.

Progressio's new campaign aims to help dismantle this wall of secrecy and support the East Timorese people's own truth and reconciliation process. In the coming months we will be asking for your support to make the UK government speak the truth, acknowledge its role in Timor Leste and commit resources towards helping the country move forward. The Timorese people have been lied to enough, and it's time for all of us to help them move forward towards justice, peace and reconciliation.

Brie O'Keefe is Progressio's campaigns officer.

SAYING NO TO TERMINATOR

AFTER NINE MONTHS, 2,000 POSTCARDS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT AND 500 VALENTINES TO EU ENVIRONMENT COMMISSIONER STAVROS DIMAS, THE MEETING OF THE UNITED NATION'S CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD) HAS FINALLY HAPPENED.

IT WAS A LONG ROAD TO GET TO BONN, WITH MANY EXCEPTIONALLY COMMITTED PEOPLE WORKING EXTREMELY HARD TO MAKE SURE THE VOICES AND CONCERNS OF POOR FARMERS WERE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE UK AND EU. YOUR CAMPAIGN HAS MADE A




REAL DIFFERENCE IN SENDING MESSAGES TO DECISION-MAKERS AT BOTH THE UK AND EU LEVEL THAT THERE IS LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR TERMINATOR SEEDS IN THE UK.

AT THE CBD MEETING, COMMISSIONER DIMAS SPOKE OF HOW KEY PUBLIC OPINION IS IN RELATION TO GENETIC MODIFICATION. HE EMPHASISED THAT WHILE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT, THE IMPACT AND FEELINGS OF THE PUBLIC ABOUT DIFFERENT ISSUES IS EQUALLY RELEVANT. THIS HOPEFUL AND IMPORTANT STATEMENT CRYSTALLISES HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT PEOPLE STAND UP AND MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD TO DECISION-MAKERS AROUND THE WORLD, AND THAT AN IMPACT CAN BE FELT.

ALTHOUGH WE REMAIN WORRIED ABOUT OTHER EMERGING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR THEM TO CREATE A 'BACK-DOOR' ENTRY FOR TERMINATOR, THE OVERWHELMING PUBLIC OUTRAGE ABOUT TERMINATOR SEEDS HAS BEEN REASSURING. YOUR VOICES AND ACTIONS HAVE HELPED THE UK GOVERNMENT TO SAY CONFIDENTLY THAT WITHIN THEIR COUNTRY THERE IS LITTLE SUPPORT FOR TERMINATOR SEEDS, AND THEIR POSITION HAS BEEN SOLIDIFIED.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP, YOUR SUPPORT HAS BEEN VITAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF THIS CAMPAIGN.

SEE PAGE 4 FOR A REPORT ON THE CBD MEETING.



What hope for Zimbabwe?

Progressio advocacy officer **Steve Kibble** analyses the prospects for a troubled country approaching meltdown

ZIMBABWE WAS DUE to hold its presidential run-off election on 27 June, with all indications that it cannot be free and fair, given the ruling ZANU-PF party's strategy of horrific formal and informal state violence against opposition activists and voters and church activists like the Christian Alliance.

The votes in the parliamentary elections were so convincingly in favour of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) that the government was unable to rig the result. Since then the violence has intensified with hundreds of deaths reported, hundreds tortured and beaten and thousands displaced. The 'electoral cleansing' strategy is aimed at disrupting opposition campaigning and ensuring that voters will be coerced into voting for the government in the run-off, or be simply unable to return to home areas to cast votes. At a Dublin meeting to celebrate Africa Day (25 May) on 22 May, organised by Progressio Ireland and Trócaire, Jestina Mukoko, director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project, stated: 'We conclude that violence has been systematic and orchestrated so that the greatest number of MDC supporters are displaced as possible.'

Normally, hyperinflation signals an end to any ruling government, but Zimbabwean 'normality' has been different since at least 2000. Given the retaliation that ZANU-PF unleashes when it is under threat, there are a number of

questions. Who is willing and able to stop a descent into repression and violence? Is there still the possibility of a peaceful transition (even if not a transformation as such)? And, thirdly, who in Zimbabwe and the region has the strategic vision to change this?

ZANU-PF has appeared largely impervious to international pressure to put an end to state-led repression and re-think its economic policies. Despite major criticism including from UN human rights high commissioner Louise Arbour, respected African bishops and leaders such as Kofi Annan, Desmond Tutu and the Kenya prime minister Raila Odinga, southern African trade unionists, churches and civil society and indeed the Zambian and Botswana governments, the Harare regime has retained some support from Africa, its neighbours and China by astute playing of the 'anti-imperialist card'. The supposed negotiations process led by South African president Mbeki has failed to help solve the crisis. Is the southern African region now sufficiently uneasy to push harder for real change?

Given that any solution has to be African-led, there has been good deal of pressure (including from Progressio advocacy partners) aimed at the Southern African Development Community to ensure a free and fair run-off and thereby bring renewed hope for Zimbabwe to escape from its current interlinked crises and stem the increasing poverty of its citizens.

Two teachers, fearful of being identified, recover from beatings received in May 2008 for supporting the opposition party MDC.

Robin Hammond/Panos

At the Dublin meeting, Rev Promise Manceda of Christian Alliance regretted the past disarray of church leaders, but welcomed their public commitment to free and fair elections and the rights of citizens to have their basic freedoms and democratic choices respected. Many pastors and priests were election observers and he stated: 'You cannot be Christian and be indifferent.' He described how pastors toured suspected torture camps attempting to stop human rights abuses and engage with the militias at considerable personal risk.

At the same meeting, long-time Progressio partner Mike Auret, formerly secretary of the Zimbabwe Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, questioned whether ZANU-PF leaders dared to lose power because of the massive amount of human rights abuses and corruption. He also stressed the need for the Church to be involved, within the necessary political and economic reform and the restoration of basic rights of citizens, in rebuilding the social fabric.

The urgent need is to respond to the long-term humanitarian crisis and its effects on the people of Zimbabwe. Whoever wins the election faces a country in total meltdown. A transition point now appears inevitable (if not immediate). The tasks will be to reform the security and legal sectors; create legitimate institutions of government; political reconciliation; rebuild an enabling state; economic recovery; and normalisation of relations with the international community for aid, debt relief and investment. All will take place under circumstances in which Zimbabweans will be extremely vulnerable to externally-imposed agendas. There will need to be a detailed investigation into who has what land under what conditions. It would be politically unacceptable to return to the highly unequal and racially-divisive ownership patterns of the past.

A national convention process could be vital in producing a new people-driven constitution. A stakeholder conference to take this forward could address issues of constitutional reform, electoral reform, land reform, truth recovery and economic and social recovery.

Steve Kibble is Progressio's advocacy officer for Africa.

Learning to be human

IN THE WORDS of the philosopher and thinker Fernando Savater, 'It is not enough to be human, it is necessary to learn to be human, and education is fundamental in making people aware about the existence of others.'

One memory from my childhood is the happiness I used to feel every time I learned something new for the first time. Although many years have passed, I still cherish this memory because it continues to be a source of happiness and inspires gratitude toward all the people in my life who have taught me so many things.

Teaching and learning are akin to living and breathing: both are necessary for each other's existence. To be human means to be two things at the same time, a teacher and a learner. Sometimes we teach without being conscious of it: we teach things to others and at the same time we learn from them as our teachers too.

Education consists precisely in accepting our duality as both teachers and learners. Education in this sense means learning to be a human being – because the physical fact of our existence doesn't mean that we know how to be human in our daily lives. We need education to become more sensitive and kind people with an attitude of solidarity; people who are aware that our lives are affected by, affect, and are sexually related to, the lives of other people all the time.

We should remember this every time we observe the irremediable reality of human violence, xenophobia, premature pregnancies in girls and teenagers, as well as the alarming spread of HIV among the population.

The spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV is related to the way people choose (or choose not) to have sexual encounters. These are decisions which are conditioned by someone's capacity for self-determination, emotional state, level of self-confidence and self-acceptance, notion of sexual pleasure, and their level of consciousness about sexual encounters and their consequences – ie, the perceptions they have about the risks of an unwanted pregnancy or of acquiring a disease.

Every educational campaign to prevent the spread of HIV should try to awaken the individual's consciousness about sexual encounters and the emotions elicited when sharing their body physically and sexually. Education is necessary to comprehend basic issues

Sexual education makes us more human and less vulnerable, writes [Monika Galeano Velasco](#)

related to HIV. Once the human being understands the meaning of something and learns to think about what it means, then and only then is it possible to change behaviour.

A holistic education is part of prevention. When providing information about HIV, if human and sexual education is left out, the process fails in practical terms. Why? Because people will not have the capacity to comprehend their sexual and human natures, nor think about their own vulnerability in relation to this virus.

Sexual education is essential in school curricula and during the first years of education because through sexual education we will be successful in educating human beings who are sensitive and free to make the right decisions about their bodies. And every one of us is the owner of our body.

To teach sexuality demands deeply

sensitive teachers, free of prejudice, teachers who appreciate that knowledge is the only way to educate true human beings, teachers who are aware of our

'It is not enough to be human, it is necessary to learn to be human'

erotic and sexual natures – in my opinion, without exception the most important link among all of us. We need to live in a world full of human beings who are free of ignorance and capable of changing any reality, who are educated in life and in sharing the fascinating experience of discovering together the excitement of living.

Monika Galeano Velasco is a Progreso development worker in Honduras, working on human rights and HIV and AIDS.



Monika Galeano Velasco.

Faithful peace

Sr Emma Delgado, a Dominican nun from Mindanao, reflects on the journey that took her to work for Peace Advocates for Zamboanga (PAZ)

COME FROM BASILAN in the southern Philippines. PAZ is 12 years old and its mission is inter-religious dialogue: we work with Muslims and Protestants, reach out to indigenous people, and dream of reaching out to the Buddhist community. We celebrate the Mindanao week of peace, supported by the government. Every year more religious communities and community groups get involved, from all over the Philippines and beyond.

My own personal story is of inter-religious dialogue in life. I grew up in a Muslim community: we played, ate and lived together without concern for religious differences. Life was beautiful. But in the 1970s the situation became very confused and the military took control. There was violence everywhere, widespread rights violations, and war. The conflict was between military forces and Moro rebel groups, and the victims were both Muslims and Christians.

We played, ate and lived together without concern for religious differences

Members of my family died as a result of the conflict and the tensions. Different communities and faiths became suspicious of each other, and hatred developed. This has been going on for 30 years now and the culture of violence is everywhere. In our own convent, a rebel group, Abu Sayyaf, nearly took us all hostage.

I became so mad with all the madness. Our family left Basilan as it was a day-to-day struggle to live amid violence and hatred. It was very hard not to mistrust other groups and faiths. At that time it was unthinkable for me that one day I would work with Muslim communities: I was against inter-religious dialogue. I would look at how Fr Angel Calvo, the PAZ Director, was working to

build dialogue between faiths, and think that he could only do this as he was an outsider and did not understand our suffering.

I became a postulant and did my training. I went to Darwin and worked on a programme for reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australians. But I realised that I wasn't being honest because there was a gap in my own understanding of how communities live together, forgive and understand each other.

I returned to the Philippines and started working on myself to reconcile my hatred and suspicion. The turning point for me was when I saw a TV report about the kidnapping of a Catholic

priest. The kidnapper had been my childhood friend and his family had been killed. When I saw his face I remembered how his family had been killed, and realised that we are all victims of the violence.

I went to volunteer in a Dominican school where 60 per cent of the students are Muslim. There was a change within me as a result of this experience. The school did not previously allow students to wear head scarves, but we did. We celebrated Ramadan and campaigned for other schools with Muslim students to do the same. I started to reach out to returnees who had belonged to rebel groups. Now I see them as models of peace and admire them, which I could not do before. And last year, when I was invited to work with PAZ, I felt ready. I never stop dreaming that Mindanao will be one.

This is an edited extract from a 'Sharing stories' session at Progressio's regional workshop on women, faith and peace, Timor Leste, 21-24 February 2006. It is taken from Faithful peace, peaceful faith: The role of women of faith in building peace by Jane McGrory.

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, women of faith are active in preventing and resolving conflict and in helping to build peace. But their efforts are generally given little attention, are poorly understood and often go unrecognised.

Faithful peace, peaceful faith, a new report from Progressio, explores the peacebuilding work and potential of women of faith. It draws on the testimonies, discussions and outcomes of a Progressio workshop for women of faith from Papua, Timor Leste (East Timor) and Mindanao, which was held as part of a three-year Progressio project on interfaith and faith-based peacebuilding in south-east Asia. Reflecting on this experience, the report argues that women of faith are strategic actors for peace and justice, and have an enormous amount to contribute in the ongoing struggle for a more just world.

Faithful peace, peaceful faith will be published in July 2008 (please check our website for publication date). It will be available as a free download (PDF format) from www.progressio.org.uk. Printed copies can be purchased from the website bookshop or ordered from Progressio (see address on page 2) price £5 plus £1 post and packing.

Faithful peace, peaceful faith

The role of women of faith in building peace
Jane McGrory

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