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WCC NEWS: "Join forces, work together" – WCC convenes workshop on HIV among migrants, refugees

1 message

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News

"Join forces, work together" – WCC convenes workshop on HIV among migrants, refugees



Ann Burton, Chief, Public Health Section of the UNHCR speaks as participants gather at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. All photos: Albin Hillert/WCC

20 February 2019

On 20-21 February, UNAIDS, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the International Catholic Migration Commission are hosting a workshop on HIV among migrants and refugees.

The aim of the workshop is to identify a roadmap for strengthening faith-based organizations' engagement in collaboration with other sectors, expanding the

role of faith-based organizations in addressing HIV risk and providing services to migrants and refugees.



WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit opened the workshop, noting how “migrants are often perceived as the carriers of diseases, while the truth is that they are the victims of negligence and indifference during the journey to and or in the host country.”

Deputy executive director of UNAIDS Tim Martineau noted that there is an enormous number of people currently on the move in the world. “But we also need to take it down to an individual level, of the human beings that are caught up in this context,” Martineau said.

Acknowledging that people on the move do face severe challenges, Martineau urged, “These must never be reasons to deny people health services, well-being, and the opportunity to thrive.”



Wangari Tharao, representative of the NGO Delegation to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, noted that, “we tend to think of HIV as an

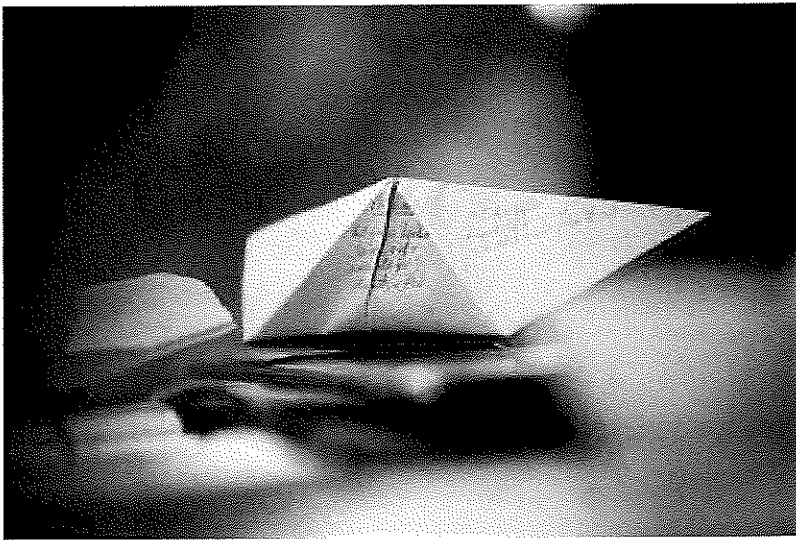
issue for others, elsewhere," and continued to pose the question of how faith communities work with key populations.

"We know that religion plays an important role among mobile populations, and often influence everyday decisions on health," Tharao said.

"FBOs reach and influence many different populations, and particularly migrants. People trust the church," continued Dr Michael P. Grillo, branch chief, Country Programs Division, director, Prevention and Education & Training, Defense Health Agency, J-9 Research and Development, DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program, PEPFAR.

"Let's build on what we have," Grillo added, stressing the importance of also pushing positive messages, that "HIV testing and treatment can lead people to full, healthy lives."

"We say with some pride", reflected Tveit, that "faith-based organizations have played a critical role in responding to HIV since the start of the AIDS epidemic more than 35 years ago."



Remembering the many people on the move, and the particular vulnerability of people migrating by boat, participants write down challenges and ways forward on symbolic boats during the workshop.

"Jesus started his life as a displaced person, seeking refuge in a foreign land," added Tveit. "But we also know Jesus was a healer. He had compassion for all."

"Our time – as before – needs signs of inclusion, and true and mutually accountable relations. Let's join forces and work together – to welcome the stranger," he concluded.

The "Workshop on HIV among Migrants and Refugees: Strengthening collaboration among faith-based organizations, multi-lateral organizations, governments, and civil society in addressing HIV risk, provision of services, and advocacy" takes place as part of the PEPFAR-UNAIDS Faith Initiative, and is organized by the UNAIDS, the International Catholic Migration Commission, PEPFAR and the WCC – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in collaboration with the Anglican Communion, the IOM, UNHCR, WHO and the NGO Delegation to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board.

WCC-EAA HIV Campaign

WCC work on Migration and social justice

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