



Statement by VIVAT International at the United Nations Social Forum under the Theme, “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of the HIV Epidemic and Other Communicable Diseases and Epidemics”, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 2 – 4 October 2017

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I am Mirel Robertus speaking on behalf of my organization, VIVAT International, a faith based organization, whose members are working in more than 100 countries in the world, both in rural and urban areas.

It is our belief that human dignity depends in part on the fulfillment, protection and promotion of one’s rights to health, and cannot be taken away just because he/she is suffering from HIV epidemic, leprosy and/or other epidemic diseases.

Since the very beginning of its presence VIVAT International has been working hand in hand with other stakeholders to combat malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other epidemic diseases in rural and urban areas. In some countries such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan, the Philippines, Germany, Poland, and some other countries VIVAT members built up hospitals and clinics and other health centers and provided doctors and nurses to help improve peoples’ health. We also run schools and add to our curricula health education. Besides, we offer trainings and workshops on health and sanitation as human rights.

In collaboration with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), we often offered programs, workshops and trainings on right based legislation at regional and local levels for multi-stake holders, especially for government officials, in order that they know how produce regulations that protect and promote people’s rights to health. We also helped revise regulations that tended to violate and neglect peoples’ rights to health.

In some Asian countries such as India, Indonesia and Thailand we provide counselling and rehabilitation centers for people with HIV/AIDS and leprosy to give them hope and self-confidence so that in times of suffering they never give up but are still able to contribute to their family and society.

Finally, we trained our members—doctors, nurses, and social workers – to always work with love and heart, because it is our belief that love changes everything. We also believe that we must be able to go beyond justice; we must promote love in our ministry. Justice speaks about rights and obligations; but love speaks about working with heart, generosity, respect and sacrifice. Love speaks about treating others, especially people living with HIV/AIDS and leprosy or other epidemics, as brothers and sisters; not as patients. Where there is love, there is no need of justice. But where love is absent, we need justice to protect and respect human dignity.

We are also aware of the challenges we are facing at present which will continue to exist in the future if we are not able to handle them. The first challenge is lack of financial support. In many countries governments tend to view our presence as competitors rather than partners in humanity. Because of that our educational institutions, hospitals, clinics, and counseling centers are facing financial problems in supporting our ministry and now are dying out. Another challenge is the fact that many of those attending education institutions and/or being taken care of in our health institutions are of poor families and are not able to pay for our treatments.

Therefore, in the name of solidarity, partnership and humanity, we recommend that national and local governments subsidize our educational and health institutions through national and local budgeting policy in order to continue our shared responsibility for a life in dignity of all, so that no one is left behind.

Thank you.