

## INTRODUCTION

### **AIDS in Africa: Engaging Canadians**

*John Kelsall*

When I visited Africa in 2003 and again in 2004, I met with community and church leaders in several countries, including Uganda, Malawi, South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland. I was confronted with the horrible reality of the devastation of the AIDS pandemic on one hand, and impressed with the positive outcomes of community-based initiatives on the other. I saw suffering and I saw hope.

I also saw the need for integrated solutions including intervention in the areas of prevention, treatment and social and family problems related to disease and death. In order to envisage participating in such an integrated solution, it would be crucial for Canadian agencies to share information, expertise and resources to deliver help in a more effective and efficient way.

Considering the magnitude of the problem and the urgency of greater Canadian involvement in the war against AIDS in Africa, the idea of a national conference was born. Our desire at Health Partners International of Canada was to bring together representatives from NGOs, healthcare companies, the medical community, financial donors and government agencies to hear an update on the medical, social and political issues related to the AIDS pandemic in Africa, but more importantly, to listen to African practitioners share their knowledge and experience and present case studies of grassroots initiatives that are producing positive results and bringing hope.

At the conference **AIDS in Africa: Engaging Canadians**, held in Gatineau on May 2-3 2005, we considered the range of needs from prevention to treatment and care to aftermath mitigation. We heard about integrated solutions involving medical, social, spiritual and political components. We showcased a variety of intervention possibilities in the fight against AIDS, and proposed ways in which Canadians can contribute to their success. We offered opportunities for dialogue between African and Canadian participants and networking among Canadian organizations.

The overriding goal of the conference was to help participants translate concern and awareness into sustained action. The event served to increase, focus and integrate Canadian/African partnerships and initiatives already underway to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, and to stimulate the creation of new partnerships and initiatives.

The realization of these ideas and projects is now up to each one of us.

More than 25 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are living with HIV/AIDS. Six thousand people die every day from the disease. These are *statistics*. When I was in Africa I met a little 10-year-old girl, the same age as my granddaughter. She was just skin and bones. She looked me in the eyes, and my heart broke. These are *people*.

It is for these people—men, women and children—that we organized this conference, that we now present this compilation of papers, and that we at Health Partners International of Canada commit to do our part in the fight against AIDS in Africa.

*John Kelsall is president of Health Partners International of Canada. Health Partners International of Canada (HPIC) is a medical aid agency that provides medicines and medical supplies, donated by Canada's healthcare industry, to Canadian doctors and NGOs working in the developing world, and to countries that are in need of medical aid.*