

HOME BASED CARE: CAN WE HELP THOSE DYING OF AIDS?

Sudan has had so many problems over recent years, including an over 20 year north-south civil war, that the AIDS pandemic has until recently received little public notice in Africa's largest country. There are no reliable statistics about the extent of HIV/AIDS in Sudan but in the Khartoum area where Together for Sudan is working, the reality is more and more apparent. Our dynamic and groundbreaking HIV/AIDS Awareness project reached some 15,000 people last year in nearly 100 outreaches in which hundreds of people testified to the destruction which AIDS has brought to their lives and families and urged others to change their behaviour. But with troops demobilising, people returning to their home regions and war continuing to displace thousands in Darfur, it is evident that the pandemic has far from peaked.

Among the greatest needs faced by people whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS is the need to die at home where possible and in dignity which excludes stigmatism, hunger and intense physical and mental suffering. Home-based care (HBC), as practiced in many African countries, does not yet exist in Sudan but Together for Sudan (TFS) would like to add a HBC component to its HIV/AIDS Awareness project. Based largely on volunteer community service, HBC could provide both hope and dignity to those whose lives have been marginalized by displacement and are now being ended by HIV/AIDS.

During my February 2006 visit to Khartoum I met with members of the Sudanese People Living with AIDS Care Association, a small non-government organization formed in 2000, which is ready to cooperate with Together for Sudan by volunteer service if we can chart the way forward. The TFS Khartoum office is in contact with UNAIDS and other international agencies seeking guidance on HBC. But already the HIV/AIDS Awareness Outreach trainers and volunteers are providing such food, medicines and befriending as they can to people in extreme need. Often these gifts of mercy come from their own pockets as all medicines, even the most basic, are beyond the reach of destitute people.

If home based care is to become a significant part of the Together for Sudan HIV/AIDS project, what we need is ongoing funding for training, food, shelter (in some cases) and medicines. Can you make a donation today to help at least one person or one family, many of which are headed by single mothers?