

CLASH BETWEEN SEX AND RELIGION

(the **XI. GNP+** Conference,
(Global Network of PLWHA),
Uganda, X. 2003)

(translated from Latvian)

Having toured Asia, Europe and American “hemisphere”, the conference is back in Africa again.

While, “thanks to” AIDS, the average life- span in **Uganda** has decreased to 42 years, this country has been chosen as the conference site due to its success in fighting AIDS. The forerunner in this fight is TASO.

The co- organizer of the conference is “NGEN+” (“National Guidance & Empowerment Network of Uganda”).

Special thanks go to conference **volunteers** – the Ugandan “Red Cross” youth, who are so pure and spiritual, that all the delegates adore them.

Seems, they are religious, and “ANERELA+” (“African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV or AIDS”) helps in coordinating them.

During the conference, the **Latvian “Youth Red Cross”** gets mentioned – they are active in AIDS prevention, forgetting that the “Red Cross” should be more involved in care.

The slogan “**AIDS care is as important as prevention**” is never implemented. Finally we get proof on it from an UNAIDS investigation on international help from the U.N. agencies, bilateral groups, international NGOs (e.g., Soross) etc. to E, SE European and NIS countries in 2001 (total: 52 million \$):

- 28% - harm reduction programmes
- 24% - prevention among youth
- 16% - prevention among sex workers and risk groups
- 14% - STD, reproductive health and vertical transmission programmes
- 3,6% - PLWHA care...!

African countries are represented by Caucasians as well. E.g., representative from Mauritius received a pre- paid “Air Mauritius” ticket to attend the conference as **openly HIV+** to be seen in mass media.

E Europeans get reprimanded for keeping too much together, and not mixing with others. For some it would be difficult due to absence of English knowledge (!)...

Comparing the piety, timidity and delicacy of Ugandan volunteers with a certain representative from Russia, one has to conclude on total moral degradation in the post- soviet area – he boasts having stolen some trinkets from the poor Ugandan cheap souvenir booths at the conference site...

Speaking of morals, there is a “parent control” programme for TV channels in Uganda!

Some other facts surprised me. During a casual conversation with two Ugandan army soldiers, I mentioned where I am from. Nobody got confused, and they fluently named the other two Baltic States. But an old, simply dressed farmer in a torn straw hat, whom I met on a boat praised without any hesitation our football team. This reminded me of some Europeans and Americans who get puzzled upon hearing a country named “Latvia”.

The conference takes place in **Kampala**, the capital of Uganda. Nearby is the Kampala mountain. It is famous for a past mass murder. The local king has been sexually exploiting boys. They protested, telling that the priest is against such acts. The king asked: “Whom do you choose – the king or the God?”. Boys chose God, and got killed along with the priest.

Even I encountered a clash between sex and religion. When I passed some stuff from my suitcase for the poor, the pentacost priest asked if I could take away the condoms. While I did it, he told that a better idea is to destroy them. Experiencing a total **clash between AIDS prevention and religion**, I finally gave him the permission...

UNAIDS warns us – AIDS prevention slogans should be changed! Naming condom use a safe sex method may actually spread the epidemics! This is only a safer sex method. **Condoms are not protecting from HIV in 10% of cases!** This does not mean that every the tenth condom is unsafe. Instead, their application has been wrong. The usual mistakes:

- no free space left at the end of condom
- no lubricant applied (increased chances for breakage)
- belated condom application.

African temperament impresses us: they precede some conference sessions by singing or dancing!

An opinion from the workshop on **support groups**: should NGOs get strengthened enlarging them? It may as well be important to remain concentrated and local!

An interesting conclusion from the ART workshop: some patients on **failing PI regimens** (VL is detectable) have a stable or even increasing CD4 count! In contrary, undergoing **psychic trauma** (mostly death of relatives or HIV+ friends) causes sharp declines in CD4 counts. Psycho- social support may help in these cases.

AIDS policy workshop gives interesting evidence: treatment activists from Costa Rica have **sued their government** for not providing PLWHA with ARVs. They won the case!

By the way, psychologists from Sussex University have discovered that **participants of campaigns**, strikes and political demonstrations **get psychologically inspired** and their sensations of stress, depression and physical pain get decreased. During protest campaigns they are overwhelmed by sense of happiness, close to euphoria...

During a “healing circle” by the lake Victoria, its leader, a Canadian Indian admitted that eventually it was God’s will he **became HIV+**. It has its positive side, as well. E.g., now he may teach others on the issue.

Here, an interesting conclusion from the workshop on sexual problems. Research of Alzheimer illness is less sponsored than “Viagra” trials. It may mean that around 2020 there will be lots of **elderly men with perfect erection** but no remembrance of what to do with it....

To end this info- sheet – a nice quote from Tagor we heard at the workshop on long- term survival:

“The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough”!

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