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Desmond Tutu HIV Centre

Youth Centre Project at Masiphumelele

I support with enthusiasm the initiative to establish a youth centre in the South African township of Masiphumelele, Cape Town.

I congratulate Dr. Michael Hayden and colleagues on launching this admirable effort in the face of a deepening HIV/AIDS crisis, which claims nearly 1,000 young South African lives every day. Your commitment is extremely important. This will be a wonderful partnership with the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation.

Masiphumelele is a vulnerable community where one in four people is HIV positive. Over half of the cases are in young women alone. A youth centre will bring many benefits that will transform hundreds of young lives and equip them with the right tools to lead the fight against AIDS.

Solutions must focus on the potential of youth, not just on their problems. To this end, I am thrilled to see that sport and recreation, education, skills training and sexual health services will play complementary roles at the centre. The programs incorporating theatre, cooking, art and dance will give life to ability and dreams for our adolescents.

I am proud to support the establishment of a youth centre in Masiphumelele and encourage individuals to grasp this rare opportunity to help enrich and empower one of our less privileged communities.

God bless you

+Desmond M Tutu Archbishop Emeritus

October 2006

October 5, 2006

LETTER OF ENDORSEMENT

As former president of Medecins Sans Frontieres and Founder of Dignitas International, I applaud the efforts of Dr. Michael Hayden and his colleagues to establish a youth centre in the Township of Masiphumelele, Cape Town in South Africa.

This is a wonderful concrete local action that can make a positive difference to peoples' daily lives, and in so doing begin to realistically address the global pandemic that is HIV/AIDS.

Every minute, a child under the age of 15 is infected with HIV claiming half a million young lives every year. My personal experiences in different parts of Africa and around the world give me a compelling sense of the profound challenges to the health of our young people.

The efforts of Dr. Hayden and his colleagues support the vision that positive change is possible.

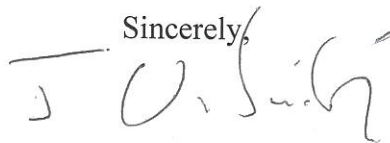
Masiphumelele is plagued by a high HIV infection rate. One in four is living with the disease, half of which are young women. High-risk sexual behaviour, concerns around HIV testing and feelings of vulnerability combine to play a considerable role in the escalation of HIV infection.

Through education, recreation and concrete sexual health services, the Masiphumelele youth center creates a real opportunity to harness the power of youth to provoke positive change in response to the AIDS crisis. Using theatre, art and dance, the centre will spark inspiration and hope that can revitalize the power of community.

I support this effort with enthusiasm and urge other individuals to participate in helping to nurture the young men and women of Masiphumelele by providing successful youth-friendly programs and services in a safe environment.

Together we can make positive change in Masiphumelele.

Sincerely,



Dr. James Orbinski

Past-President, Médecins Sans Frontières;
Founder and President, Dignitas International;
Associate Professor of Medicine and Political Science,
University of Toronto.