

Africa AIDS Project

The following communication was submitted January 22, 2001, on behalf of the BGAN Africa AIDS Project that has been spearheading Boston's activist response to the global AIDS epidemic. The Africa AIDS Project formed as a small study group under the BGAN umbrella, and quickly emerged as one of its most active task forces, playing a role filled elsewhere by such notable organizations as ACT-UP Philadelphia, the Health GAP Coalition, and the Treatment Action Campaign of South Africa.

OVERVIEW

The AIDS epidemic is the most deadly epidemic in history since the Black Death. In Africa, 16 million people have already died, over a quarter of them children. Another 25 million people - more than half of them women - are either HIV-positive or have AIDS.

Yet effective treatments for HIV/AIDS exist.

In Africa, people are not dying of AIDS. They are dying of poverty. They are dying because they are African, because they are black, and because they are poor. They are dying, in large part, because of the greed of Western corporations and the callous pro-corporate policies of the World Bank and the IMF. One could also say that they are dying because of our indifference, or at least our failure to organize effectively.

Created in August 2000, the BGAN Africa-AIDS Project's first goal is to raise awareness that the United States bears a great responsibility for the African AIDS epidemic:

- U.S pharmaceutical corporations sell AIDS-treatment drugs at outrageously high prices. For example, Pfizer charges over 30 times more than the price of its generic equivalent. Companies get away with this profiteering because their patent rights are protected throughout the world under WTO international trade agreements.
- African nations are forced to spend a large portion of their budget paying back debt to World Bank creditors, leaving little money for health care. The US plays a decisive role in establishing World Bank and IMF policy.

Our second goal is to organize pressure on U.S. corporations and the government so that they change these policies. We join with activists in Africa and around the world in demanding:

- Affordable access to AIDS-related drugs
- Debt forgiveness for African nations
- \$4 billion a year investment by the international community to fight AIDS in Africa

So far, the BGAN Africa-AIDS group has organized two demonstrations against Pfizer on September 26 and December 1, 2000.

CURRENT FOCUS

We are currently discussing our priorities for the coming months. Ideas we are considering include:

- Education and information campaign on the links between the African AIDS epidemic and corporate globalization;
- Partnering with community based organizations in all efforts; and,
- Shareholder divestment campaign targeting drug companies, to pressure them to drastically reduce prices of AIDS treatment drugs.

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