



MESSAGE

by

**THE HONOURABLE T. DESMOND BANNISTER,
M.P.,**

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

on the occasion of:

2010 World AIDS Day

at

S.C. McPherson Junior High School

Baillou Hill Road

Nassau, The Bahamas

30th November, 2010

10:00 a.m.

Around the world, for the past twenty (20) years, December 1st has been observed as “**World AIDS Day.**” It is a time dedicated to increasing awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection, raising money for those infected with the disease and providing education **about** how the disease is contracted and ways to prevent it. Although HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, being HIV positive does not mean that you will necessarily get sick or die of AIDS or related diseases –hence, Education.

World AIDS Day also provides an important opportunity for governments, national AIDS programmes, faith-based organizations, businesses, community organizations and individuals to bring attention to the epidemic in their own country. It is a reminder to all of us that HIV has not gone away and there is still much work to be done. Recent reports suggest that the incidence is on the rise for some countries where we were seeing a decline. One reason given is that treatment is so effective; there is no longer a fear of death. Another myth often cited is that only certain kinds of people, who engage in certain types of behaviour can get **HIV/AIDS**.

The theme chosen for 2009 and is extended to 2010 by the World AIDS Campaign is “**Universal Access and Human Rights.**” This theme encourages us to deepen our understanding of those infected and affected by the disease, develop partnerships with those persons working in HIV and AIDS and challenge discriminatory laws, policies and practices that stand in the way of access for all to prevention, treatment, care and support.

For persons who are HIV positive or living with AIDS, access to treatment and care is critical to combating this life threatening disease. Yet in some developing countries many persons are not able to receive or afford the medical attention they need. In other instances, stigma and discrimination are the two main reasons that cause many to refuse access to treatment and care, even though it may be free of charge.

In 1948, the *General Assembly of the United Nations* proclaimed the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The declaration upholds the dignity of everyone. It states that people all over the world have the same basic rights, just because they are part of the human family. Further, that

everyone has a **right** to a standard of living that is adequate to ensure their health and well being. In essence, every individual infected with HIV or AIDS has a right to receive help available to fight this disease. Further, it is **our human right** to give those infected a fighting chance to survive.

In The Bahamas, HIV/AIDS patients are receiving quality medical care which gives them more than a fighting chance to survive. Since the establishment of our National AIDS Programme in 1988, successive governments have made HIV/AIDS, a major priority. Today persons living with HIV or AIDS can access free counseling, free testing and free medication from the Princess Margaret Hospital, the HIV/AIDS Centre of the Ministry of Health and several government clinics in Nassau and in Grand Bahama. We are grateful to our many strategic partners and stakeholders, both national and international for the role they play in making this possible.

While we, here in The Bahamas have had much success in the area of HIV/AIDS, nationally, there is still so much more that we can do. We **must** ensure that persons living in our Family Islands can access testing, treatment and care in

their **own** communities. The Ministry of Health is committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable to HIV, can access testing, treatment, and care and we **must** continue to promote not only a medical, but also a “social and legal environment that is supportive of safe and voluntary disclosure of HIV status.”

The Government of The Bahamas, in general, and the Ministry of Health, in particular, will continue its efforts to maintain a safe and supportive environment which will facilitate voluntary disclosure of HIV status.

I congratulate you for the success that you have realized in your fight against HIV/AIDS, and wish you all the best in the years to come.