

Stephen Lewis Foundation Statement

TAC \$1 Million Match Challenge

November 20, 2015

"It is a bitter irony to recognize that on World AIDS Day, December 1st, the premier organization in the fight against HIV/AIDS is in desperate financial straits. I speak of course of the Treatment Action Campaign of South Africa. No government, no international financial institution, no other NGO has come close to saving so many lives. Without TAC's brilliant, principled, unswerving interventions, millions would have died, and millions would not now be in treatment. They took on a government in denial and forced it to completely reverse policy. If there's any justice in this world, the international community of funders will fill TAC's coffers to overflowing."

—STEPHEN LEWIS, CHAIR OF THE BOARD
STEPHEN LEWIS FOUNDATION

THE TREATMENT ACTION Campaign (TAC) has been the voice of the African continent on the HIV & AIDS pandemic for more than 15 years. The world is now in danger of losing one of its most important activist organizations. TAC has been struggling with a pending financial crisis for more than a year, and the situation is now truly dire. They are already being forced to retrench and have cut back infrastructure; unless they are able to obtain \$2-3 million dollars in new funding by March 1st 2016, their doors will begin to close. Committed, hugely experienced and talented staff will be forced to seek other employment, and "the world's most effective AIDS group"¹ will start to fade into memory. This cannot possibly be allowed to happen, and the Foundation is now moving together with TAC to ensure that it does not.

South Africa has always been highly influential in the region; all the high prevalence countries look to South Africa to take the lead, and that leading role has been shaped by TAC. TAC's future will also affect the futures of thousands of other truly essential organizations in the countries most affected by HIV & AIDS. It will be a harbinger of things to come if TAC is allowed to fail.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation is therefore issuing a challenge to the world's funders: to the large private foundations, family foundations, national governments, corporate partners and global financial institutions whose decisions have an impact on countless lives in the fight against HIV & AIDS. We are asking that these organizations join with us in securing the future of South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign. **The Foundation will match up to \$1 million dollars in contributions for TAC's budget.** We welcome and entreat all potential donors, from far and wide, to meet this commitment in order to ensure that TAC reaches its target by March 1st, 2016. We are making this dramatic

overture to open the possibility that TAC will be made secure and buoyant into the future. Our hope is that a group of supporters will come together, with an understanding of the need to establish sustainable funding for TAC for the next 3-5 years. Our challenge will help to take TAC through the first year, giving everyone the incentive to stabilize the future.

TAC has been a relentless voice of and for people living with AIDS since 1998. Arising out of South African communities at the epicenter of the pandemic, TAC has mobilized a nation, made brilliant use of the courts, applied constant and consistent pressure on decision-makers, and saved millions of lives. Through its peaceful activism, TAC supporters forced their government to stop denying AIDS. They forced drug companies to stop denying HIV treatment to all but the wealthiest. They forced their urgent message—*our members are dying; you must act*—upon an indifferent world.

Because of TAC's determined activism, the South African government relented, the official policy of AIDS denialism was overturned, and access to treatment was brought to life. South Africa's universal government treatment programme is now the largest in the world. TAC itself now has over 8,000 members and a comprehensive network of 182 branches and provincial offices in seven of the country's provinces. They organize locally, demanding genuine accountability and the delivery of quality health care services to all the people infected and affected by HIV & AIDS their communities. TAC's work on HIV prevention, and treatment literacy and care at the grassroots is vital to ensure that people enter and succeed on life-saving treatment.

AIDS is not over. 37 million people are infected with AIDS around the world, 25.8 million of them are in Africa. In South Africa alone there are more than 3 million people struggling to stay on treatment, over 300,000 new infections each year, and 400 people dying

¹ New York Times, August 20, 2006

each day from AIDS and TB. Young girls in South Africa are more likely to die of AIDS-related causes than any other. The struggle is in full throttle, and the need for TAC's leadership is as great as it has ever been. What is changed and failing is the attention of major global funders. In 2015, PEPFAR gave \$413 million to the South African government, and nothing directly to TAC. The Global Fund gave \$150 million to the government, and nothing to TAC. And TAC is not alone, we have been witnessing a steady erosion of support for civil society and community-based organizations—the actual front line of the fight against HIV & AIDS—across sub-Saharan Africa.

UNAIDS is calling for the HIV and AIDS response to be fast-tracked over the next five years. They warn that unless the response is considerably strengthened by 2020, the sustainable development goals for health the international community has set for 2030 will not be reached. In the report UNAIDS released this year with the Lancet Commission, they further warn that the failure to seriously engage with the challenges HIV & AIDS is currently presenting could lead to a global resurgence of the disease. The continuing strong presence of TAC, and of other key civil society organizations, is absolutely essential to keep the response on track.

This is why TAC and the Stephen Lewis Foundation are urgently seeking contributions from private and family foundations, and from national governments, who should be mobilizing their international assistance mechanisms, such as DFID, CIDA, SIDA, Noraid and USAID. All of them fully realize what is at stake here and should consider making donations directly to TAC. TAC is also pursuing greater support from domestic sources

within South Africa. Perhaps above all, there is a clear obligation on the United Nations agencies—such as WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women—to meet the expectations of their coordinating body, UNAIDS. These agencies should most certainly come together to make a collective contribution to TAC.

The Foundation is digging deep. While we have been supporting TAC since 2006, we are now dramatically stepping up our contribution because this is a critical juncture in the organization's life and indeed, in the course of the pandemic. We have moved rapidly to leverage these funds with the support of a new donor. This enables us to maintain our existing financial partnerships with over 140 community-based organizations in the 15 countries hardest hit by the pandemic, whose work is also being seriously undermined by the drifting attention of the major donors.

There are at least three million people alive and on ARV treatment today in South Africa who would never have been on treatment if it had not been for TAC. We would not have the AIDS response apparatus that exists now in so many countries if it wasn't for TAC. They are so important in the life of this pandemic, and it is devastating to think that they could be closing their offices. TAC must have secure funding until 2020, for the sake of the millions of people in South Africa and across the region who are struggling to survive, and who won't survive without TAC's involvement. Strong activism and rights-based, democratic leadership by TAC has driven the HIV & AIDS response for 15 years. TAC simply must continue.

Contributions to meet this challenge can be made directly to TAC or to the SLF.

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