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## PACANet MCP Consultation Communiqué

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### **Preamble**

From 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> April 2010 in Ezulwini, Swaziland, the Pan African Christian AIDS Network (PACANet) convened a consultation of senior Church leaders, Christian organisations and individuals involved in the response to HIV and AIDS in Africa, hosted by the Swaziland Church Forum on HIV and AIDS. This event was held in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), UNAIDS, Christian Connections for International Health, the African Network of Higher Education in Religion Theology HIV and AIDS (ANHERTHA), and INERELA+ (the International Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV). The purpose of the consultation was to provide a forum for key stakeholders to discuss the issue of multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships (MCP) as a risk behaviour for HIV. In attendance were 90 participants from 18 countries. The participants represented different church backgrounds, namely the African Instituted churches, the Evangelical movement and the mainline established churches.

PACANet is a continental networking body that seeks to link churches, Christian organizations and networks in Africa to enhance their HIV and AIDS responses by sharing ideas, skills, experiences and resources and to stimulate strategic partnerships. Given this mission, PACANet sought to rally participants around the issue of MCP, which is a key driver of HIV transmission.

Participants identified the following as some of the key factors that promote MCP: economic poverty, unhealthy cultural practices, negative peer influence, alcoholism, uncertainty about gender role functions and unrealistic expectations, a lack of intimacy within established marriages and sexual dissatisfaction, confusion about personal identity and spiritual immaturity, uncertainties about masculinities and femininities, the role of film and media.

### **Confession of faith**

As Christians we believe that God created male and female, and a unique relationship between a man and a woman, which we call the institution of marriage. The Biblical understanding of marriage is a covenantal (permanent) union between a man and a woman. Relationship between man and woman should reflect the relationship of Christ and the Church. In order to exhibit this Christian understanding people are equipped by the Holy Spirit.

### **Acknowledgement of difficulties and challenges**

We acknowledge:

- The difficulties and the challenges of applying the Biblical principles to the realities of life issues as related to marriage.
- That we have tended to be reactive rather than proactive in dealing with matters of marriage, sex and sexuality.
- There is often a discrepancy between the values that we hold and the realities on the ground.
- The pain and suffering that our silence and inaction have caused to many women, men and children.

## Recommendations

We call for:

- New patterns of thinking in the way we understand man and woman from a Biblical perspective in their equal dignity and complementarity.
- Reflection and research on the authority of Scripture, and the use of the Bible in pastoral ministry.
- Church leadership to lead by example and preach the gospel of life with honesty and integrity.
- Journeying with our communities towards transforming negative and harmful cultural practices (illuminating realities) surrounding marriage and family life.
- The reframing of the way in which males understand their unique identity so that they can respect women and be actively engaged in ending all forms of abuse (against women and girls), and vice versa.
- Greater support for discordant couples, and widows and widowers who are living positively with HIV.
- Strengthening and development of programmes for:
  - ✓ Couples (pre-marriage preparation and ongoing marriage enrichment)
  - ✓ Children and youth on sexuality (life skills, identity development and humane sexuality)
  - ✓ Widows and widowers
  - ✓ Singles
  - ✓ Men (ministries targeting men to be involved in tackling MCP)
  - ✓ Ministers (continuous theological education and capacity building on emerging issues relating to MCP)
- More research on how MCP is related to promiscuity and what kind of ethics come into play when a person has multiple and concurrent partners.
- Greater pastoral care for those currently living in multiple and concurrent partnerships.
- Engagement of the media to raise awareness of the dangers of MCP and to promote sound values for marriages, family, and human relationships.

## Commitment

We commit ourselves to greater networking and partnership among ourselves and all other stakeholders (civil society, government, international partners and people living with HIV) in order to address the problematic issue of MCP in an appropriate and timely manner, given the unique African context and setting.

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