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Why the 26th Niwano Peace Prize is being awarded to The Reverend Canon Gideon Baguma Byamugisha.

The Niwano Peace Prize Committee has decided to honour The Reverend Canon Gideon Baguma Byamugisha with the 2009 Niwano Peace Prize, in recognition of his work to uphold the dignity and human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Canon Gideon Byamugisha, an Anglican priest from Uganda born in 1959, learned in 1991 that he was HIV positive. He determined to turn personal suffering into a spiritual and social message of hope and courage. He was the first African priest to declare, publicly, that he himself was HIV positive, breaking one of the most important barriers in the struggle against HIV, that of stigma-induced silence. He is Canon of two cathedrals, one in Uganda and one in Zambia, and works through many other channels to fight injustice, with a special focus on children.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic wreaks untold suffering on the 33 million people who now live with the disease, their families, their communities, and their countries. The pandemic is one of today's leading humanitarian challenges. Peace cannot be achieved, especially in the most afflicted countries, without courageous efforts to address HIV/AIDS. Thus the pandemic has an important place in the political and economic agenda of most nations as a humanitarian, development, human rights, and security issue. The Security Council and several Special General Assemblies of the United Nations have addressed the issue. UNAIDS, a special multi-agency UN body, was created to lead the global struggle to overcome the effects of the pandemic. The Global Fund to Combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the World Bank, and UNICEF devote large shares of their resources to combating the pandemic. HIV/AIDS is one of the universally accepted Millennium Development Goals, and it is an important issue for G-8 meetings.

What is most urgently needed are creative partnerships, public and private, global and local, and courageous leadership in confronting this complex disease with a strong ethical compass and determination to prevent its spread and to treat those who suffer with respect and compassion. The leadership and support of faith leaders, who have been part of the problem (as they contributed to stigma) and can be a central part of the solution, are vitally needed.

Canon Gideon is such a leader. He is fearless in touching sensitive subjects, using his personal example, ethical principles and even humour to make his point. In breaking the deadly silence and misunderstandings that long permeated religious communities about HIV/AIDS, he has become a worldwide agent of hope among people gripped by the horror of the pandemic.

The committee was deeply impressed by his extraordinary personal dedication and courage in addressing this devastating affliction. He has helped to raise public awareness about the disease in a way that has marked religious and cultural communities in his own country, Uganda, across the African continent, and on a global level. He is a powerful, engaging speaker who has changed

hearts and minds about HIV/AIDS. He has acted with wisdom and compassion and demonstrated great gifts in communicating with people of different cultures, young and old.

Canon Gideon is a man of both words and action, showing persistent and creative leadership as he mobilizes religious leaders and faith communities to develop strategies for information, care and prevention. One such strategy is to create and build networks in the fight against HIV/AIDS-related stigma, denial, inaction and discrimination. Of particular note, he has championed the development by religious leaders and institutions of a unified and positive message in HIV/AIDS education.

About 85 % of Africans belong to some kind of religious community, making places for worship ideal venues for education about HIV/AIDS. The infrastructure of organized religion is vastly larger than that of secular NGOs, health organizations, governments and the UN based support systems. Canon Gideon has recognized and tapped into this potential.

Canon Gideon provides the world with a fine example of an intelligent and engaged clergyman speaking forthrightly about the nature of HIV/AIDS and the rights and responsibilities of those affected. His work has a global impact. His voice is heard and respected wherever the challenge of the pandemic is being addressed. He speaks widely, at conferences on HIV/AIDS organized by the scientific and professional health communities, and by the United Nations and in communities and churches. His words touch people and change minds. He also acts to give new hope to the millions of children orphaned by HIV and AIDS, working directly with hundreds of children in his own community.

Among his many initiatives and achievements, the foundation in 2002 of the African Network of Religious leaders living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS (ANERELA) deserves special focus. The network was taken global in 2008, and includes almost 2,500 leaders.

Canon Gideon is the founder and leader of the Hope Institute for Transformational Leadership and Development. He has served the Uganda AIDS Commission, World Vision International, and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, and is a Christian Aid Goodwill Ambassador on HIV and AIDS. He sits on the board of the African Think Tank of HIV Management, which brings together clergy, NGOs, the private and public sector, policy-makers, and health professionals.

The 2009 Niwano Peace Prize is awarded to Canon Gideon Byamugisha for his outstanding service to humanity.