

WORKSHOP 2

UNAIDS and International Research: Creating Partnerships Workshop on Bioethical Considerations in Cross-Cultural Research

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UNAIDS feels privileged to participate in this meeting devoted to developing a strategic plan for the Fogarty International Center's bioethics initiative. The topic of 'Bioethical Considerations in Cross-Cultural Research' is fast becoming a central focal point for discussing relationships between developed and developing countries. This discussion is encouraging us to re-evaluate observational, epidemiological, and clinical research sponsored by instances in the developing world and carried out in resource-poor countries. At the same time, it is also asking us to reappraise relationships in the sharing of information, knowledge, and products related to health care.

As you are well aware, the AIDS pandemic is relentlessly progressing, leaving in its wake a devastation whose social, economic, and political consequences cast a dark shadow over a large part of the world's population. The growing figures of this one disease are staggering, the suffering following in its path immeasurable. And the magnitude of the future impact of this virus on the health, economies, and political stability of many nations cannot at this time be clearly estimated, nor appreciated. We have an obligation to respond to this affront to human dignity with as much force as we can muster individually, nationally, and in the international arena.

The themes of the application of international guidelines, the sharing of perspectives, and developing ethical study design and review lie close to the heart of the approach UNAIDS has been developing in its own programs to fight both the disease and the suffering it causes. Thus, we welcome the FIC's initiative to convene a workshop that addresses the core issues in international biomedical research today. However, UNAIDS wishes to emphasize that it is not only the themes being addressed that are of importance in this workshop, but also the open and cooperative spirit with which the FIC has framed the workshop.

We are all in agreement today that biomedical research is only ethical when it is carried out in a state of equipoise among persons and institutions who respect one another's dignity and integrity. In a world characterized by profound social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities, national and international institutions will increasingly need to work together in open fora if they are to provide an efficient and satisfactory response to the exigencies of human suffering.

During the past two years, largely within the context of the programme for vaccine development, UNAIDS has carried out a broad consultation process throughout the world. This process has been designed to promote discussion and understanding on the ethics and science of international research among all of the parties involved. Crossing boundaries of nations, cultures, and economic strengths in biomedical research requires an enormous investment in local, national, and international dialogue and education on values in research.

UNAIDS recalls the open exchanges between the newly appointed Director of the FIC and the Director of UNAIDS in the months prior to this Workshop. We share a common conviction that an ethics of equality in international biomedical research requires partnership between international

and national institutions. It is our hope that this Workshop will prove to be a milestone in the furtherance of this much needed partnership.