

A LETTER FROM STEPHEN LEWIS

To the grandmothers: here, there, everywhere!

I want to assure everyone that I share the sense of exhilaration that grips the Stephen Lewis Foundation and the National Advocacy Committee at this memorable point in time.

It's a natural evolution to have NAC branch out on its own, just as it's natural for the SLF to applaud this development and to be supportive of it. After all, NAC now has several years of advocacy under its belt ... advocacy at once principled, effective, tenacious. NAC has managed to mobilize grandmothers into energetic activists for important causes. They don't always win, but they make their presence felt.

At the same time, the SLF has sunk its roots ever more deeply into the culture of grandmothers across Canada. I'm deeply proud of the Foundation. It's held in huge esteem across Canada, and the work it has done at the grass-roots of Africa is everywhere honoured. When I travel in Africa, I can't get over the way in which the Foundation is a virtual household name in so many countries.

Thus there is strength on both sides of this new arrangement, and it's an arrangement whose time has come.

But it won't be easy. No one should allow the euphoria of the moment to lull us into the assumption that all will be hearts and flowers. There will be moments of tensions and potential disagreements. It's not only predictable, it's healthy. What is important is that cool heads prevail. What is important is that no one ever forgets why we're in this struggle: we're here for the grandmothers of Africa. Nothing else is of consequence. All else pales.

While I wish NAC all the best in its advocacy – I really want them to succeed – I cannot yank my mind away from the accelerating truth that in many parts of Africa life at community level is getting worse, not better. The resources from the Global Fund and the American Presidential Initiative (PEPFAR) are stagnating, even depleting. The grandmothers struggling with AIDS need us more than ever. Raising funds becomes more important than ever.

It's hard work raising money. It's repetitive; it can be boring; it's frustrating. But it's the indispensable heart of everything we do and stand for.

I beg you not to upbraid me for this partisan view. I have seen too much misery over the last decade to tolerate more of it. The Foundation brings hope and life. That's why it was created.

So here we are at a new, exciting juncture. NAC shapes the Canadian advocacy; the SLF pursues the programmes. What could be better?

Let's make it work.

