

# People of Faith Urged to Challenge Big Pharmacy Over AIDS Drugs

People dying from AIDS-related illnesses have waited long enough for a response from a pharmaceutical industry dragging its feet in search of profits, participants meeting in advance of [AIDS 2012](#) were told.

David Deakin, from Tearfund in the United Kingdom, who once worked in the industry, spoke of the 15-year battle between 1996 and 2003.

“Ten million allegedly died from AIDS then as a direct result of the intransigence of the pharmaceutical industry,” Deakin said. “They have a systemic problem that needs to change.”

“We supply 8 million patients now with ART (antiretroviral therapy) but by 2030 this will rise to 50 million,” Deakin said. “With second- and third-line drugs (required when patients become resistant to first-line drugs), things will only get harder.

“Today, 4,657 people will die of AIDS, mainly due to lack of access to appropriate drugs,” he said.

More than 400 people of faith attended the interfaith pre-conference to AIDS 2012, titled “Taking Action for Health, Dignity and Justice,” on July 20-21 at Howard University in Washington, D.C. AIDS 2012 was also held July 22-27 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

“What use are expensive second- and third-line drugs to patients who can’t afford them?” asked Esteban Burrone, policy advisor of the Medicines Patent Pool set up in 2010 to promote access to affordable HIV medicines in developing countries. “We invite the industry to sit down and discuss how they can bring down prices.”

Burrone spoke of the royalties involved and bilateral licenses offered in secret and called for more transparency.

“We have taken the first step in a long march,” he said. “We need to bring the (pharmaceutical industry) to the negotiating table, learn from our own mistakes, find a solution and work collaboratively and voluntarily. I am convinced the

pharmaceutical industry can do more.”

Dr. Ronald Lalthanmawia with the Christian Medical Association of India spoke of the challenges in his country, where he said that they would need many more second-line drugs by the end of 2012 but treatment depended on available funding.

“We are seeing international companies taking over drug patents, and second-line drugs are now six times more expensive than first-line,” Lalthanmawia said.

“We should put on pressure to stop licensing which blocks access for poorer countries,” he said. “We need to be more people-centric rather than concentrating on products; second-line drugs need to be more accessible.”

Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service, pointed out “every person not treated is an unnecessary death. The U.S. spent \$225 million each day on the war in Iraq, \$18 million each day on their pets. The issue is not funding but priorities, and they have to change.”

Deakin asked for an immediate response using Twitter to target eight pharmaceutical companies that are not willing to enter negotiations with the Medicine Patent Pool.

Giving out their addresses, Deakin asked delegates to message, “Ppl of faith say global access now! Put yr #HIV meds in #the pool!”

Quoting Isaiah, “The Lord saw no justice and no one to intervene,” Deakin called for people of faith to not stand back but to intervene.

AIDS 2012 is the 19th International AIDS Conference and the first to be held in the United States for more than 20 years.

The conferences are held every two years and are the peak forum for those working in the field of HIV and AIDS, including scientists, researchers, policymakers, health professionals, people living with HIV, civil society activists and faith-based organizations.

*Rev. Alan Bain has been an Anglican minister since 1978 and has been vicar of St. Philip and St. James Bath since 1981. He became involved with HIV and AIDS as a result of his church’s involvement with Uganda, South Africa, Eastern Europe and*

*India over the last 20 years. He is a founding member and chair of CHAA (The Christian HIV/AIDS Alliance), which brings together 18 of the major U.K. agencies working in the field of HIV and AIDS. He has also been a broadcaster with the BBC. This column first appeared on [TheBaptistTimes](#).*