



Turning the Tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa
stephenlewisfoundation.org

Dear Grandmothers of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign,

I am writing today to talk about the relationship between GRAN and the grandmothers groups in the Campaign. The transition to GRAN as an independent organization has not always been as obvious or as smooth for some as it has for others, or as we'd hoped.

We have heard that there is still both confusion and consternation about how to deal with this in a concrete way in your group meetings, gatherings, and public appearances. What I would like to offer in this missive is what the Foundation is currently focussing on, and some clarity about what this means for the advocacy work and the fundraising imperatives.

GRAN is now a separate and distinct organization, a quite remarkable development in the history of the Campaign, and something of which we can all be proud. As a distinct organization, it has its own mandate, its own policy focus, its own way of working, and its own partnerships. In reality, we differ on some of these things – but why not? Since GRAN is now an independent entity, there is no reason why it shouldn't make its own choices. The SLF is only one organization that GRAN speaks to, and we are not an official partner of GRAN, nor does GRAN consult us on its activities or its focus. In fact, when Stephen met with GRAN some time ago, he was clear that he did not think the partnership with Results Canada was a particularly useful one, and he was equally clear that he did not welcome the partnership with Education for All for the reasons he set out in a chapter in *Race Against Time*. So as two distinct organizations, we are not always in agreement. And although we share a commitment to the grandmothers of Africa, we have some fundamental philosophical differences on how to do this work and what the focus should be. For the Foundation, it's supporting the African grandmothers to do what they must in the care for each other, their communities and their grandchildren – and now, to speak for themselves with governments, rather than being heard through intermediaries.

Through your unwavering and remarkable support (20 million dollars in 7 years!!), the community-based organizations run by and for grandmothers have managed to enhance the quality of life of the grandmothers and children in their care. They are receiving housing, food, home-based care, participating in innovative and effective income generation, and so many of their grandchildren are now in school and thriving. It's a joy to behold, and the African grandmothers are tremendously proud of their achievements and well-being, and of the organizations with which they feel so intimately connected. As a *direct result*, grandmothers in Africa are ready to take the next step...to begin to address the challenges they face at a systemic level. This means that while they are adamant about continuing the vital life-enhancing and life-saving provision of services (and this **MUST** not be compromised, they insist), they are beginning to work on their own country-level advocacy – to claim their rights, to ensure that while their grassroots groups cannot reach all grandmothers in the country – the systems, policies and programmes can be changed at the national level to meet the needs of every grandmother in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, etc.

This is what led to the Tribunal on Grandmothers' Rights in Vancouver in September (and I urge you to read the summary of the judgements at the beginning of the Tribunal Report!). At the SLF, we were responding to the emerging priorities of the projects who wanted to talk about more systemic obstacles to the well-being of grandmothers and orphaned children in their care. It is why the projects and the testifying grandmothers at the Tribunal wanted to talk about land rights, inheritance rights (and property grabbing), food security, orphan care,

access to health care for older women, pensions, harmful traditional practices, discrimination and stigma, and host of other human rights violations. It is why the Tribunal also focussed on what the community-based organizations are doing to advance the cause of grandmothers' rights in their countries -- from meeting with Ministers to joining land rights councils.

You will hear the SLF talking A LOT about advocacy in the coming years. As always, the focus of the Foundation remains on responding to what the grandmothers in Africa, and their organizations, are doing right now and what they ask us to support. While advocacy in Canada plays a role, it is the advocacy being done by African grandmothers, in their own voices, in their own countries, that is urgent and powerful and has the potential to increase the visibility, power, justice and well-being of grandmothers in Africa. They have asked us to raise the funds for Country-Level Gatherings so that all the groups working with grandmothers (some of which we fund, some of which we don't yet) can come together to form their own national agendas and priorities to advocate with one voice and greater power. They have also asked us to raise funds for all the work that comes after – to ensure that these vital changes come about. You heard Sipiwe and Robina at the Tribunal. They spoke for every organization with whom we have the privilege of working: they are ready, they are moving, they are determined to achieve human rights for grandmothers in their countries, and they want their own voices heard in the capitals and the international community. They are doing it for themselves and we can stand with them now and ensure that they are heard and heeded.

That's the Foundation's focus on advocacy.

I know many of you 'wear two hats' , but the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign of the Stephen Lewis Foundation exists to raise the solidarity funds that respond to African grandmothers needs right now – both for quality of life, and for their own advocacy. Your fundraising is not short-term, it's not less exciting or important than anything else, it's not less needed. Far from it. It is transformative for the lives of African grandmothers and their projects and will change everything for all the grandmothers in their own countries. The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign has provided the funds that, in the hands of African grandmothers, is facilitating this moment in which they are articulating a new agenda, a new vision, and have the leadership and determination to make it happen.

This is the advocacy you are directly supporting. This is solidarity in action – taking action – and we watch with profound respect and awe as we see it unfolding on the continent. We will be with them every step on this journey. Nothing could be more important in this moment than the resources to make it happen. Hence, this *cri de coeur* to stay with the African grandmothers at this turning point in their lives and well-being – to keep up the fundraising as you have so tenaciously and with such massive success and heart. *The reality is that in the current funding climate, funds for African grandmothers' advocacy simply don't exist as they ought to.*

We cannot and will not tell you what each group should do about its relationship with GRAN – you will make those decisions in the same way that you decide whether or not you partner with other organizations in your communities that are not part of the Campaign. I think at this juncture the SLF needs to respond to the many queries from you about where we stand on this work. The difficult truth is that as African grandmothers move now to do their own Advocacy in their own voices we do not think that GRAN's work is complementary with the goals or vision of the Campaign – to respond directly to the work, needs and vision of the African grandmothers.

The time, energy and funds that are being diverted away from this critical work of African grandmothers in the pursuit of Canadian advocacy is simply not compatible with the Foundation's mandate nor that of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign.

The grandmothers of sub-Saharan Africa are stepping forward to advocate and speak for themselves in their own countries and it's not long before they'll be a force to be reckoned with on the international stage as well. Stay with them. Bigger change is coming, and you are an integral – vital – part of it!

With great appreciation and love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ilana Landau-Lin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Ilana