

“Dear Grandmothers and Grandmothers,

We are writing, with a combination of regret and enthusiasm, to tell you of a significant change in the leadership of the Stephen Lewis Foundation. After fifteen years at the helm of the Foundation, our founding Executive Director, Ilana Landsberg-Lewis has decided to move on. It was a terribly difficult decision for Ilana to make.

She threw her life, stupendous energy, endlessly fertile imagination and passionate commitment to grassroots efforts around HIV & AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, into building the Foundation and, over time, turned it into one of the most formidable development organizations of Canadian civil society.

From the extraordinary success in funding grassroots projects in fifteen African countries, to the brilliant creation of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, to the remarkable Grandmother gatherings in African countries, to the astonishing fund-raising galas like Hope Rising, to the current focus on gathering information from indigenous African Community-Based Organizations --- information of such value that the Foundation is now celebrated and consulted internationally on the role of CBOs --- to the raising of well over one hundred million dollars since 2003, to the principled focus on vulnerable groups; women and girls and the LGBTQ community ... in every sense Ilana provided leadership that was without equal in its field.

It must also be said that perhaps Ilana’s greatest achievement has been the respect and dignity accorded our African partners. The Foundation has, from the outset, worked on the premise that the projects in Africa know best what is required in the fight against the pandemic, and the Foundation exists to respect their priorities. That partnership is a matter of intense pride at both ends of the spectrum. It is fair to say that our African partners love the Foundation, and the love is reciprocal. And that love and support has expanded exponentially with the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign!

Of course, Ilana did not build the Foundation alone, and together with you, and the passionate, committed and talented staff of the SLF, she leaves us with an organization that is vibrant and resolute. And of course it will continue...as it should, and as it must. We are not yet at the end of the scourge of AIDS in Africa, and as the world begins to retreat from funding the work at the grassroots across the continent, we are confident that you will be there with us to insist that African grandmothers and their community-based organizations at the heart of the response are not forgotten. In addition, the Board of the Foundation has asked Ilana to stay on in an Advisory capacity for a year and she has agreed. This role will allow Ilana to pursue new and strategic fund development and growth opportunities for the SLF, and secure, even more firmly, the financial base. The transition to new leadership will be seamless.

So Ilana’s departure as Executive Director is what we meant at the outset when

we used the word 'regret'. But we also used 'enthusiasm', and that applies to her immediate successor. We are delighted and proud to inform you that Zahra Mohamed will assume the post of Interim Executive Director, effective February 25th. Everyone in the Stephen Lewis Foundation family knows and admires Zahra. She has been a force in the Foundation for more than a decade, as a member of the Programme Team, as Director of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, as Director of Canadian Partnerships and Human Resources, and currently as Deputy Director. The beauty of having Zahra, is the depth of continuity: she knows the values and operations of the Foundation, inside-out. She knows the Board, she knows the staff, she knows the projects, she knows the programmes, she knows the funding. Where could we find a better person?

In sum, we are absolutely confident that the Foundation has many more worlds yet to conquer, and we rejoice in the knowledge that you will continue to be with us every step of the way, to ensure that the African grandmothers and grandchildren and their community-based organizations continue to thrive, organize and overcome.

Warm Regards,"
Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign Team