

FIRST PARTICIPATION BY THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA IN THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN ESTHER ALLIANCE ON HIV/AIDS

On 24th and 25th November 2011 the Annual Meeting of the ESTHER Alliance took place in Paris. The ESTHER Alliance (Ensemble pour une Solidarite Therapeutique Hospitaliere En Reseau) comprises a web of the European governments which promotes the connection of health professionals and relative agents with the immediate aim of cooperation in the fight against HIV/AIDS, relative infections and their consequences as well as Europe's participation in the achievement of the aims of the millennium as well as the agreed on commitment of the countries for the global approach to prevention, cure and care regarding HIV/AIDS.

Participating in the meeting were representatives of the Alliance from France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland. Others taking part in the deliberations were high-ranking representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Labour of France, as well as a representative of DG DEVCO – Europe Aid from the European Union.

Greece was represented – for the NFP ESTHER Greece which is under the auspices of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, – by Dr Chrysoula Botsi from KEELPNO (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention), a pneumonologist, TB specialist, humanitarian and communications specialist on health, an HIV/AIDS specialist and permanent representative of His Beatitude in European and international activities and programmes and organizations dealing in HIV/AIDS issues and human trafficking.

For the first time at a meeting of the Alliance His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa was represented by the Very Reverend Archimandrite Panteleimon Arathymos, Chief- Secretary of the Holy Synod.

The thematic units which were discussed during the two-day meeting were as follows:

1. Activities of developmental cooperation in the field of health – the example of the ESTHER Alliance: activities in Norway, Germany, Spain and France.

2. Electronic implementations in health professional education. ICT education programmes were presented on a post-graduate level on HIV/AIDS from France and Spain.

3. The possibilities of finding funds for the activities of the Alliance. Possibilities of development of common programmes between the member countries.

4. The strategy of developmental cooperation in the field of Health on the part of the European Union.

The first session, regarding the activities of international cooperation and with associates outside of the European Union, was presided over by the Very reverend Archimandrite Panteleimon Arathymos, while the third session regarding the areas of health, presiding was the representative of NFP ESTHER Greece, Dr Chrysoula Botsi.

The participation of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, following a decision by His Beatitude, was a necessity so that the inconspicuous activity of the Orthodox Church on health issues in Africa, could be recorded also in the areas of Europe, as occurred during June 2011 at the General Assembly of the UN regarding HIV/AIDS.

During the deliberations of the annual meeting Archimandrite Panteleimon Arathymos presented analytically the healthcare institutions and the health units of the Patriarchate of Alexandria which exist and operate effectively on the African continent, a fact which caused particular interest among the participants. This was because the Ancient Patriarchate has an active participation in almost all fifty countries in Africa; consequently it is the only agent which has at its disposal a ready network to channel activities, coming from the European Union and other international Organizations, for the benefit of the African citizens suffering from HIV.

The recording and presentation of the overall statistical details which those who serve at the medical units of the Patriarchate throughout Africa keep, remains, in order that the ESTHER Alliance be made aware of them and that the ways of cooperation with the Alexandrian Church can be made definite.

Also emphasized was the enormous importance which the voices of the religious leaders have in confronting this disease. The promotion of Christian teaching regarding the uniqueness and sanctity of the human person as a divine creation, to which total respect is due, the honour and its resulting protection personally and collectively, as well as the fight against the social stigma are the responsibility of the religious communities in this struggle.

Finally, the clear positions of the Orthodox Church of Africa were pointed out once again, regarding the issue of the meeting which are:

1. Free provision of medication to all borderline and HIV/AIDS sufferers, with as many possibilities as are offered technically and legally for access to cheap and safe medication.

2. The provision of fast and reliable diagnosis and observation of the HIV infection.

3. The immediate and correct informing of the population regarding the HIV infection by authorized scientists, as well as the unequivocal condemnation of every form of stigmatization and social exclusion of sufferers, and lastly

4. The creation, on behalf of all involved international and local agents and organizations, services to do with the HIV infection, structures and all manner of medical, medicinal and social provisions – which the modern developed world enjoys – to all the people of Africa, together with ensuring correct diet and drinkable water.

After the deliberations of the meeting His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Issues of France Mr Alain Juppé, hosted an official dinner in honour of the participants, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is to be noted that the active participation and the positions taken by the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria at the annual meeting of the ESTHER Alliance received the general approval of all participants, and the Very Reverend Chief-Secretary announced the invitation of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria to host the next meeting in 2012 at the Patriarchal See, In Alexandria, Egypt.