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Inaugural message at the Inauguration of the Male Sexual Health and HIV in Asia and the Pacific International Consultation: "Risks and Responsibilities." - 23rd September 2006.

Dear Friends:

The need for this special Consultation illuminates anew the bleak wasteland that is prejudice. It illuminates more clearly than ever that a caring, compassionate society is sustained by justice ... the coming together of all of you from many nations across Asia and The Pacific is a bright light on the path to justice and equity.

We struggled against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over, because black people were made to suffer for something we could do nothing about: the colour of our skin. Sexual orientation is also a biological given, homophobia is as unjust as was apartheid.

We need enabling environments, provided by society and supported by laws, so people can indeed protect themselves. That is their right: Their right to know and the right to protect themselves and their loved ones. No one should be denied access to life saving services.

Prevention and treatment go hand-in-hand. And for prevention of HIV there must be more innovative, bold and honest messages, free of prejudicial restrictions and based upon sound evidence.

I commend those of you who are working for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. I know that much is being done but we are not yet winning the battle against HIV. Too many lives are being lost prematurely. This Consultation brings many constituencies together to focus on this effort. I wish you well in your discussions and hope that they will bring us closer to an end to this pandemic that is decimating our communities.

God bless you

Desmond M Tutu Archbishop Emeritus