



Montreal, 26 January 2004

Monsieur Pierre Marois
President
Human Rights Commission
360, rue Saint-Jacques (2nd floor)
Montreal, Quebec H2Y 1P5
FAX: 514 873-2373

Dear Mr. Marois,

We are following up to our letter of 14 January, in which, on behalf of our members, we strongly urged the Commission to launch an investigation into the matter of HIV testing of priesthood candidates.

In light of the events of the last weeks, we repeat our call, since the matter has become even more urgent.

First, all Quebecers living with HIV received a slap in the face from Cardinal Turcotte, when he made public statements defending the decision to ask all priesthood applicants to undergo HIV testing, and suggested that HIV-positive people would not be able to fulfill the duties of priesthood. Then, in response to the discovery that an HIV-positive person had performed surgery at St-Justine hospital, there have been calls for mandatory HIV testing of health-care workers, despite 20 years of consensus that this is not the best way to protect patients, and despite the minimal risk of HIV transmission from health-care providers to patients. And finally, Peter Yeomans, City of Montreal Executive Committee member responsible for public security, irresponsibly suggested that applicants for Montreal's police need to be free from HIV to be able to do their job.

We are shocked by how little people in power and ordinary Quebecers seem to know about HIV and people with HIV, and by their willingness to exclude them. The Commission and the Quebec government have an obligation to counter the stigma and prejudices against HIV-positive people.

Between 14,000 and 22,000 people in Quebec are believed to be living with HIV or AIDS. Every year, another 800 to 1,500 become infected. Because of new treatments, the majority of these people are living longer and in better health. They seek employment and want to fully contribute to society. We cannot allow discriminatory attitudes and behaviours interfere with

their legitimate aspirations. Over the last ten days, we have received many calls from people living with HIV and from their physicians. They told us how severe the impact of the statements made by public figures and normal citizens has been, and how they feel let down by the Church, the City of Montreal, and parts of the media.

Our concern, expressed in our letter of 14 January, that we will see an increase in discriminatory practices against people with HIV if the Commission does not launch an investigation, is bigger than ever.

We would also like to inform you that today we have also written to the Ministry of Health and Social Services, asking that it fund a province-wide campaign against HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

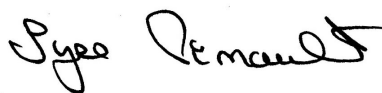
We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Ralf Jürgens
Executive Director
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

417, rue Saint-Pierre, bureau 408
Montréal Québec H2Y 2M4
tel : (514) 397-6828
fax. : (514) 397-8570



Lyse Pinault
Executive Director
COCQ-sida

1, rue Sherbrooke Est
Montréal, Québec H2X 3V8
tel : (514) 844-2477
fax. : (514) 844-2498

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) is a national organization engaged in education, legal and ethical analysis, and policy development. Founded in 1992, the Network promotes responses to HIV/AIDS that respect human rights; facilitate prevention efforts and access to care, treatment and support; minimize the adverse impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals and communities; and address the social and economic factors that increase vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and to human rights abuses. The Network is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Its work has received national and international recognition, and the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS has included the Network's activities in UNAIDS' collection of "best practices."

About COCQ-Sida

COCQ-Sida (www.cocqsida.com) is a coalition of 35 Quebec community organizations involved in the fight against AIDS. This coalition acts as the voice of these groups both within the province and across Canada. Its mandate is to represent member organizations and thereby promote co-ordinated action in areas of shared interest. To help ensure its members are involved or consulted when policies to address HIV-AIDS issues are planned, implemented or evaluated, COCQ-SIDA fosters awareness of the expertise and contribution of community and non-governmental organizations in the fight against AIDS.