

# Action for Anthony: A Hollow Victory

## Report to the congregation of MCC Toronto



*Excerpt: "The good news is that, for the first time, inexpensive ARV drugs have gone from Canada to Africa to help fight HIV/AIDS. The bad news is that Apotex [the generic drug company] found the experience to be so harrowing they will never again participate in [such a] complicated process. This seems like a **hollow victory** to us, since we may never see it duplicated."*

In June 2007, guest preacher Rev. Jim Mitulski spoke to our congregation at Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, of his visit to an African village where he encountered an infant named Anthony. Anthony had contracted HIV at birth and died not long after from AIDS. His death could have been avoided, if only he had been given access to some of the medications made easily obtainable through legislative schemes, such as CAMR.

CAMR is *Canada's Access to Medicines Regime*, legislation enacted in 2005 to assist with the production and transportation of inexpensive, anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs to developing African nations where some 18 million people are living with, and dying from, HIV/AIDS. We also learned that not one pill had been sent from our country since the legislation had been passed.

The Action for Anthony team was formed in response to this situation. We set about to research all aspects of this complex affair, to arm ourselves with the knowledge necessary to affect change. Our stated mission was to overcome the obstacles prohibiting the Canadian government's pledge of providing affordable HIV/AIDS medication to developing nations, via CAMR.

The result is a 40-page document, titled *Action for Anthony Research Summary and Considerations*. It is an extensive and comprehensive summation of all sides and parties who have been involved in this crisis. It clearly outlines the stated positions taken by the various groups who feel they have a stake in the CAMR legislation and its process.

This research document is available to anyone wishing to read the arguments put forth by both the Government of Canada and the research-based pharmaceutical companies. It meticulously breaks down the original Jean Chretien Pledge to Africa in May 2004, gathering complementary and supplementary data and arguments in response to the legislation.

From November 2006 to May 2007, the Canadian government conducted an extensive review of this legislation. In December 2007, it concluded that it was too early to determine whether the legislation needed revising. Since the last federal election, we appear to have much the same political situation as when the CAMR was first examined. We feel it is time for all Canadians to inform their federal government that more needs to be done to produce a much simpler and more effective piece of legislation, to support the flow of ARV drugs to the developing world.

As Stephen Lewis pointed out, CAMR sets up a 'labyrinth' for generic drug companies to work through, in order to fulfill their mandate. So far, only one Canadian generic drug company (Apotex) has been asked by one African country (Rwanda) to bid for a contract to supply ARV drugs. Having won the contract, Apotex spent countless hours and \$2 million fulfilling their contact with Rwanda.

The good news is that for the first time since CAMR was put in place, inexpensive ARV drugs have gone from Canada to Africa to help fight HIV/AIDS. The bad news is that Apotex found the experience to be so harrowing they will never again participate in so difficult, time-consuming, expensive and complicated a process. This seems like a hollow victory to us, since we may never see it duplicated.

As Canadians, we of the Action for Anthony team find this to be 'a bitter pill to swallow' and totally unacceptable for a traditionally benevolent country such as ours. As a church that actively engages in supporting social justice issues, we feel more can be done. For example, each one of us can inform our federal MP of the need to fund and support the delivery of these vital drugs to the millions who are suffering and dying.

The research document has already been forwarded to key stakeholders with interest in this vital issue. It can provide you with the information you need to decide what you can do to help prevent this devastating situation from continuing. It is available to anyone wishing to read it. Please send an email request to [actionforanthony@mcctoronto.com](mailto:actionforanthony@mcctoronto.com) and we will be happy to forward it to you.

It has been a privilege serving the congregation of MCC Toronto and we thank you for the opportunity. The Action for Anthony team concludes its work on a bittersweet note, knowing that while some ARV drugs have gone from Canada to Africa during our mandate, the CAMR legislation remains unchanged and unworkable. There is still much work to be done to assist those in need.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Action for Anthony Team, MCC Toronto**

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