



SOUTH AFRICA GRANDMOTHERS STATEMENT

WE STAND HERE TODAY AS THE GUARDIANS of our country's future. For years, we have struggled to raise our grandchildren, and hold together our families and communities. We came together in groups, supported by our community-based organizations, and found strength in unity. Our love has transformed the devastation of AIDS. We thought we were doing our duty. We knew we were demonstrating our love. In fact, we were raising a nation.

And we are not alone. Grandmothers across Africa have been gathering for the past ten years. From Canada, to Swaziland, to Uganda and now in South Africa, we have moved from mourning to a movement. We have been doing our part, and have become experts on how to survive and thrive in the midst of the AIDS pandemic. It takes so much more than ARVs to resurrect a community. South African grandmothers spent two days together in Durban as the world prepares for the International AIDS Conference, 2016. Today we come to insist that we receive increased support and to have our expertise counted.

We have learned how to be parents to orphaned children in a time of crisis, developing new strategies to help them stay safe, heal their emotional wounds, and regain hope. Yet these youngsters are your citizens, and they deserve more, including good quality education that feeds their souls as well as their minds, protection from violence, and opportunities for decent, safe employment. Our government must help nurture these children and youth who will lead Africa out of the AIDS pandemic.

Our country created protections for grandmothers. There are pensions, foster care grants and stipends

for home-based care workers. To see these measures put in place to protect our rights, gave us hope that our burden would be less heavy. But they are not working. When it can take years for a foster care grant to be processed, when grandmothers have to travel long distances to visit government offices who turn them away again and again, when pensions are hopelessly inadequate and don't start until 60, then we are dealing with a system that is in desperate need of change.

As older women, we face challenges that are still ignored. The health system is failing us and HIV+ grandmothers have special needs that are not met. We wait in lines at clinics for hours, meet with healthcare workers who are often uncaring and do not have the medication we need. Violence is a constant threat, whether it is rape and assault on our bodies, or physical abuse and intimidation from family members and loan sharks who are after our small savings. We suffer without protection. And when we look to Parliament, there is no one who stands for our interests, no one who speaks for us. We are pillars of our communities, and we live our lives as examples, we are caring for so many children, but who is caring for us?

We will continue to struggle, and we will not give up the fight against HIV & AIDS. We will never give up because this grandmothers movement is powered by love. But we should not have to do this alone.

To the international community we say: you have overlooked us for far too long. Remember - Nothing About Us Without Us. To our own government we say: It's time to do right by your grandmothers!

Africa cannot survive without us. We are not asking for charity, for pity or for favours. Access to healthcare, protection from violence, political representation, food security, shelter - these are our human rights. We have come to claim them.

Amanda!