

Rainbow Centre, Catholic Diocese of Moshi, Tanzania

*[Rainbow Centre, an NGO supported by the SLF, is responsible for HIV and AIDS prevention, care and support. It finds loving families for children who have lost a parent or whose parents are unable to fully support them. Rainbow Centre was founded by a nun whose autobiography **God Forbid** is summarised below. <http://www.heri-na-baraka.de/heri-na-baraka.de/English.html>]*

A Nun's Story



At the age of 15, Majella Lenzen entered a Missionary Congregation in Germany. As Sr. Maria-Lauda, she served for three decades in Africa as a nurse and administrator, turning a small run-down rural hospital in Tanzania into a phenomenal network of hospital and health services. Money for support flowed from Catholic aid agencies because of her obvious competence.

In Zimbabwe, she tried to persuade her superiors to begin internal renewal and reform, following the principles of Vatican II, but without success. Eventually, when she adopted a more democratic style of working with her Africa sisters, things came to a head: she was sent home.

On her return to Tanzania, she started the Rainbow Centre - the Catholic church's first AIDS programme in the diocese of Moshi - which soon became a model for the church's AIDS work throughout the country. Yet the success of the Rainbow Centre led to Sr. Maria-Lauda's final break with her Congregation. While visiting Morogoro, Sr. Lauda used the Rainbow Centre's vehicle to transport the team to the area where an AIDS doctor had successfully helped prostitutes regain their own independence. On this trip condoms were distributed to prevent further spread of infection. Even though Sr. Lauda visited the sick and dying during this event, this incident led to the charge that Sr. Maria-Lauda, a Catholic nun, was distributing condoms. (The institutional Catholic Church forbids the use of condoms even in a life and death situation.) The Bishop in Moshi refused to "work with people who distribute condoms". Her work contract was discontinued and since apparently there was "no use for her" in the Congregation either, she returned to Germany, suffering trauma from the whole chaotic upheaval.

God Forbid is the tragic tale of a highly intelligent, skilled and committed Catholic Sister whose talents were ultimately rejected by the church hierarchy. Without any trace of bitterness, Majella Lenzen tells her story frankly and clearly, even with a mixture of humour, irony and humility. She has not lost her Christian faith, nor her belief in the church, despite the injustices which she has suffered. She did, however, choose to leave her Congregation in October 1995. Only with legal assistance did Majella eventually secure a minimal living allowance. What was even more humiliating and soul destroying was that the service she freely gave in love, and in the name of the church, left her now literally begging for her own survival.

