



**AIDS 2006**

*Time to Deliver • Passons aux actes*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## XVI INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE CLOSURES WITH CALL TO DELIVER ON UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PROVEN PREVENTION STRATEGIES, HIV CARE AND TREATMENT

Hopefulness and Impatience Mark Conclusion of Six-Day Meeting of PLWHAs, Scientists, Activists, Policymakers and Community Caregivers

**Toronto [18 August 2006]** A sense of hopefulness tempered with growing impatience marked the end of the XVI International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2006) today, with scientists, clinicians, policymakers, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and other community leaders and caregivers calling for an accelerated pace to scale up HIV prevention, care and treatment programs in resource-limited settings.

"The convergence of global stakeholders at AIDS 2006 has provided an ideal opportunity to examine the gap between what society is capable of doing in the face of this unprecedented humanitarian crisis and the actual level of response," said Conference Co-Chair Dr. Helene Gayle, outgoing President of the International AIDS Society (IAS) and President and CEO of CARE USA. "Despite important momentum over the past few years, the slow pace of progress has led to growing impatience. My hope is that we will use what we've learned here in Toronto to strengthen the global response."

"This conference cannot be deemed a success unless we collectively realize our theme of Time to Deliver," said Conference Co-Chair Dr. Mark Wainberg, Local Host Board Chair and Director of the McGill University AIDS Centre. "Indeed, we will have failed unless we dramatically and rapidly expand by millions the numbers of people around the world with access to antiretroviral drugs and simultaneously scale up prevention. Progress cannot be achieved if more people become infected by HIV each year than the numbers that are able to access treatment."

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), at the end of 2005 an estimated 39 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, the vast majority in developing countries. Last year, 4.1 million people became newly infected with the virus, and 2.8 million died of AIDS-related illnesses. Of the 6.8 million people living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries who are in need of antiretroviral medication (because the level of deterioration of their immune systems warrants beginning treatment), only 24% (1.6 million total) have access. The treatment access gap is even greater for children under 15. Just 8-13% of the 800,000 children in need of HIV treatment have access. Fewer than one in five—4% to 16%—of people at high risk for infection have access to effective prevention.

### **Conference Concludes with Rapporteur Reports and Closing Plenary**

During the conference a team of more than 60 rapporteurs prepared written summaries of conference sessions to record what was discussed and identify next steps on a range of important issues. Chief rapporteurs from 13 topic areas presented weekly summaries this morning, and all reports and summaries are available online at [www.aids2006.org](http://www.aids2006.org).

As part of the Closing Session, Kecia Larkin, the first Aboriginal woman in Canada to say publicly that she is HIV positive, issued a passionate call to action. With her teenage daughter standing next to her, Larkin implored the international HIV/AIDS community to include Native peoples in its work. "HIV is an epidemic alive in our communities and I will no longer be silent about this truth," she said.

Dr. Anders Nordstrom, Acting Director-General for the World Health Organization, spoke of the need for innovative financing mechanisms and for national governments to make HIV/AIDS a funding priority. He also underscored the importance of addressing workforce issues during scale up. "The most important area to ensure success in achieving universal access is a skilled and motivated workforce. No improvement in financing or medical products can make a lasting difference to people's lives until the crisis in the health workforce is solved."

In his closing keynote address, United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa and former Canadian Ambassador to the UN Stephen Lewis said, "I challenge you my fellow delegates to enter the fray of gender inequality. There is no more honourable and productive calling. There is nothing of greater import in this world. All roads lead from women to social change, and that includes subduing the pandemic."

"All the knowledge, innovative research and new tools will not be effective without the political leadership that is essential to halting this disease," said Dr. Pedro Cahn, who assumes the presidency of the International AIDS Society today. "We will not accept a Schindler's List for HIV in which the lives of those who receive treatment are saved and others are left behind to suffer and die. We must keep pressure on the G8 leaders to follow up on their commitment to achieve universal access to prevention, care and treatment by 2010." Dr. Cahn is President of Huésped Foundation and serves as Chief of the Infectious Disease Unit at Juan A. Fernandez Hospital, and as Assistant Professor in Infectious Diseases at the Buenos Aires University Medical School in Argentina.

As part of today's Closing Session AIDS 2006 Co-Chair Dr. Mark Wainberg and Toronto Mayor David Miller officially transferred the International AIDS Conference glass globe from Toronto to Mexico City, the host of AIDS 2008. Accepting the globe for Mexico City and Mexico were IAS Governing Council member Dr. Luis Soto-Ramirez, of the Molecular Virology Unit at the Department of Infectious Diseases at the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Medicas y Nutricion (INCMNSZ) and Mexican Minister of Health Julio Frenk.

### **XVI International AIDS Conference**

The XVI International AIDS Conference, organized by the International AIDS Society (IAS) and the AIDS 2006 Toronto Local Host, is the biennial gathering of the global AIDS community. The conference will feature the presentation of more than 4,500 abstracts and an array of community and cultural activities. Over 26,000 participants from more than 170 countries are in attendance.

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IAS, the world's leading independent association of HIV/AIDS professionals with 10,000-plus members from 153 countries, convenes the world's largest meetings on HIV/AIDS--the International AIDS Conference and the IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention. The Local Host has been responsible for preparing Toronto and Canada as host city and country, as well as for a number of programme activities. The conference co-organizers are UNAIDS, Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, International Council of AIDS Service Organizations, International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS and the Canadian AIDS Society.

**Additional Resources**

For additional information, including programme information, abstracts, rapporteur and scientific summaries, and links to webcasts, podcasts, transcripts and presentations from key conference sessions, please visit [www.aids2006.org](http://www.aids2006.org).

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