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Layton and Lewis issue challenge to Conservatives: Time to deliver on HIV/AIDS

QUEBEC CITY - Today, NDP leader Jack Layton joined with Stephen Lewis, the United Nations special envoy on HIV/AIDS, in calling for immediate action to address the global HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"We can no longer afford to wait for Liberal or Conservative governments to join in the urgent fight against HIV/AIDS," Layton said. "As Stephen Lewis has been saying for too long, it's time to deliver."

Layton joined with Lewis and a coalition of Canadian organizations to endorse the Global Treatment Access Group's "Four Steps for Canada Platform" to address the global AIDS crisis. Layton said that the NDP intends to draft legislation to give effect to the Plan, including:

- Committing to a timetable to bring Canada's official development assistance to 0.7% of GDP;
- Investing in the public health systems in developing nations to better respond to the HIV pandemic;
- Cancel the debts of developing nations burdened by AIDS; and
- Follow through on a three-year old commitment to allow cheaper, generic drugs to be produced in Canada for use here and abroad.

He challenged MPs from all parties to support the legislation and to press the Harper government to enact it quickly.

"The NDP has made some modest steps. The historic NDP budget in 2005 secured an additional \$500 million investment in official development assistance," Layton said. "Our Foreign Affairs critic, Alexa McDonough also succeeded in getting MPs to unanimously adopt a motion calling on the government to honour its commitment meeting the 0.7% target by 2015. It's time to take the next steps."

For decades, Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to meet Canada's long-promised foreign aid target of 0.7% of GDP, or to even set out a timeline to do so. Each day 6,300 people in Africa die of HIV/AIDS, yet not a single pill has been exported under the act passed in May 2004 to make less expensive HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria drugs available to developing and least-developed countries.

"When close to 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS today, we need a Prime Minister who demonstrates leadership, compassion and resolve in the fight against this disease," Layton said. "Instead Mr. Harper skipped out on the International AIDS Conference in Toronto. Canadians demand better."

Layton and Lewis spoke as over 1,200 delegates from across Canada gathered for the first day of the NDP's policy convention in Quebec City.

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