

October 6, 2004

Honourable Aileen Carroll
Minister for International Cooperation
200 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec
Canada K1A 0G4

Dear Minister:

We write on behalf of the undersigned civil society organizations, many of whom actively participate in the Microbicides Advocacy Group Network (MAG-Net). MAG-Net is a coalition of 30 Canadian AIDS service organizations, sexual and reproductive health organizations, international development NGOs and researchers interested in promoting the development of alternative HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention options. MAG-Net is the Canadian arm of the Global Campaign for Microbicides, an international coalition of more than 180 NGOs worldwide that collaborate to build support among policymakers, opinion leaders, and the general public for increased investment in microbicides and other user-controlled HIV prevention methods.

Canada has been a leader in the global fight against AIDS, including supporting vaccine development and ensuring access to treatment for HIV/AIDS and opportunistic infections. Indeed, Canada is the largest government funder to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), and is supporting the African AIDS Vaccine Programme. Canada is also the first industrialized country to undertake the development of a comprehensive HIV vaccines plan.

With respect to treatment, Canada has recently amended its federal law to allow the export of generic versions of medicines still under patent in Canada, and has committed substantial funding to the World Health Organization's "3 by 5" initiative to ensure access to antiretroviral therapies for three million people in developing countries by 2005. We welcomed the announcement earlier this year that Canada is doubling its current annual contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We encourage the government to further enhance its support to this critical multilateral initiative so that Canada's contribution is proportionate to our share of global gross domestic product.

In addition to support for HIV vaccines and treatments, the world must also make a substantial investment in the development of, and eventual access to, HIV microbicides. Protecting and fulfilling the human right of all persons to the highest attainable standard of health requires pro-active measures to equip people with accessible, affordable HIV prevention tools that are fully under their control. While all people will benefit from the eventual availability of microbicides, the need is particularly urgent when it comes to protecting women's health. Women's subordination around the world, and the denial of women's human rights, exacerbates their vulnerability to HIV infection, particularly in the absence of female-controlled prevention methods.

We therefore welcome your recently expressed commitment, as Minister for International Cooperation, to ensure Canada plays a leadership role in addressing HIV/AIDS as a gender issue, and we urge you to strengthen Canada's contribution to the global effort to develop and deliver HIV microbicides. In light of gender inequalities, to ensure a comprehensive Canadian response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to meet its domestic and international commitments, Canada should support research and development of female-initiated prevention technologies such as microbicides. Support in this area should include generous funding for

organizations such as the International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM) and support to Canadian organizations actively involved in community-based research and community preparedness.

In addition, Canada could show leadership on the global stage by developing a Canadian Microbicides Plan. Such a Plan, much like the Canadian HIV Vaccines Plan, could outline Canada's contributions to microbicides development, delivery and equitable access both domestically and internationally. It would be linked to the Vaccines Plan currently under development, and include Canadian contributions from multiple sectors (government, researchers, community organizations, private sector), thus ensuring a comprehensive, coordinated Canadian response.

These steps would demonstrate Canada is acting on its commitments both domestically and internationally, as outlined in the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS, the CIDA HIV/AIDS Action Plan, and the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS endorsed by Canada. These documents outline Canada's commitment to supporting the development of prevention technologies, particularly ones that would address women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

We are enclosing additional background information on the importance of microbicides and will be in touch with your office next week to see if we can arrange a meeting with you to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Michael O'Connor, Executive Director, Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
Paul Lapierre, Executive Director, Canadian AIDS Society
Ralf Jürgens, Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

Cc: Nancy Connor - Principal HIV/AIDS Adviser, CIDA

MAG-Net Members:

Africans in Partnership Against AIDS
AIDS Calgary Awareness Association
AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia
AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County
AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area
AIDS Committee of Simcoe County
AIDS Community Care Montreal
AIDS Saint John
Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
Canadian AIDS Society
Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Canadian Treatment Action Council
CARE Canada
Conception Bay North AIDS Interest Group
Global Campaign for Microbicides
HIV Edmonton
Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
Kali Shiva AIDS Services
Kootenay Boundary AIDS Network Outreach and Support Society
Ottawa-Carleton Health Department
Peterborough AIDS Resource Network
Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada
Positive Women's Network
Voices of Positive Women

Other Signatures:

AIDS Bow Valley
AIDS Committee of Guelph & Wellington
AIDS Vancouver
Alberta Community Council on HIV
Canada-Africa Partnership on AIDS
Canadian Society for International Health
Central Alberta AIDS Network Society
Christian Children's Fund of Canada
Coalition on International AIDS and Development
HIV/AIDS Africa Support Group - Christ Church Cathedral
HIV/AIDS Network of South Eastern Alberta
Les enfants de Béthanie
McGill Global AIDS Coalition
National Congress of Black Women Foundation
Nine Circles Community Health Centre
People to People Aid Organization
Students Against Global AIDS
Toronto People with AIDS Foundation
USC Canada