



News Release Communiqué

For immediate release

MONTREAL SEX WORKERS AND JAMAICAN LGBT RIGHTS ACTIVIST WIN 2006 AWARDS FOR ACTION ON HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

OTTAWA / NEW YORK, September 28, 2006 — Gareth Williams, a leading AIDS activist and voice for the rights of sexual minorities in Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean, is the recipient of the 2006 International Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch announced today. Stella, a Montréal-based support and information group organized by and for sex workers, is the recipient of the Canadian Award.

The Awards highlight outstanding individuals and organizations that protect the rights and dignity of those infected with HIV and affected by HIV and AIDS.

“Violent homophobia combined with misconceptions about HIV have created a poisonous environment for lesbians and gay men in Jamaica,” said Rebecca Schleifer, a researcher with Human Rights Watch’s HIV/AIDS Program. “Against enormous odds and at great risk to his own physical safety, Gareth Williams has been a courageous campaigner against human rights violations against lesbians, gay men, and HIV-positive Jamaicans.”

As the lead activist and main fundraiser for the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG), Williams spearheads an emergency support program that provides material care and support for victims of homophobic violence, including assistance with taking their cases through the justice system. Williams also played a key role in encouraging community members to share their stories with researchers for the 2004 Human Rights Watch report, *Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence, and Jamaica’s HIV/AIDS Epidemic*.

Stella, the recipient of the Canadian Award, serves women, transvestites and transsexuals. The group maintains an ongoing presence in sex work venues, including streets, escort agencies, massage parlours and strip bars.

“Since 1995, Stella has worked to improve the quality of life and working conditions of sex workers so that they may work and live in safety and with

dignity,” said Joanne Csete, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “With this Award, we’re recognizing over a decade of courageous work defending sex workers’ human rights and advocating against the criminalization of their lives and livelihood.”

Stella also runs a phone line, medical and legal clinics, and visits to sex workers in prison. With the participation of sex workers, Stella develops and distributes information and prevention tools, such as a list of bad clients and assaulters, the *XXX Guide* and the *Dope Guide*. In 2005, Stella hosted Forum XXX, an international gathering of 250 sex workers. In August, Stella played an important role in organizing sex work activities at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto.

In 2002, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch established the Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights to recognize excellence and long-term commitment to work that has a direct impact on HIV/AIDS and human rights issues — particularly work of direct relevance to marginalized individuals and communities. An award is presented annually to one Canadian and one international recipient.

The 2006 Awards will be presented tonight at the Holiday Inn Plaza la Chaudière Gatineau-Ottawa Hotel, 2 Montcalm Street, in Gatineau, Quebec, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. This event is open to the media. For more information on the Awards, please visit www.aidslaw.ca/awards.

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) promotes the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada’s leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

About Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org), the largest human rights organization based in the United States, monitors human rights developments throughout the world. Human Rights Watch’s HIV/AIDS program has been documenting human rights abuses linked to HIV/AIDS since 2001, producing a body of documentation that includes more than 30 reports, hundreds of policy recommendations, and numerous policy briefing papers. By revealing the terrifying range of human rights abuses faced by people living with and affected by the disease, the reports have compelled governments and donors to act on these abuses as part of an effective AIDS response.

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