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QUICK FIXES TO CANADA'S ACCESS TO MEDICINES REGIME LEFT BEHIND AS MPs CLOSE COMMONS

Developing countries remain without affordable medicines from Canada

TORONTO, June 21, 2007 — Members of Parliament have missed a chance to fix Canada's Access to Medicines Regime and get affordable drugs to people in developing countries who desperately need them, said the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network today.

"We gave Parliament a detailed brief on how to fix the Regime. But instead of passing what amount to straightforward amendments to streamline the law and make it useful, parliamentarians have left Ottawa early to hit the barbecue circuit," said Richard Elliott, Deputy Director.

A federal government review of the Regime (originally passed in May 2004 as the *Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa*) was announced in August 2006, but not begun until over three months later. The review was not completed before Parliament recessed for the summer break. In April 2007, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology held three days of hearings as part of a separate review.

"It's been over three years since the Regime was passed. In that time, not a single pill has left Canada — not because of a lack of supply or demand, but because of a lack of political action," said Elliott. "We need a simplified law that actually works — but we won't get it if MPs are flipping burgers instead of working on the necessary amendments."

As it stands, the Regime is full of needless red tape that discourages all stakeholders — from developing countries that want to buy affordable generic drugs, and pharmaceutical firms in Canada that want to sell them, to humanitarian organizations that want to deliver the drugs to patients — from actually using it.

In numerous letters and briefs, the Legal Network has repeatedly urged Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament to deal quickly and effectively with this problem, and outlined specific steps to help solve it.

The most recent brief, submitted as part of the Legal Network's testimony before the Commons Industry Committee, included 13 recommendations, the cornerstone of which is a proposal to authorize *any* pharmaceutical firm to produce generic versions of *any* drug patented in Canada for export to *any* eligible developing country listed in the law.

The full text of the brief, entitled "Getting the Regime Right" is available at www.aidslaw.ca.

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.

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