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CANADA UNFAIRLY BERATED BY INTERNATIONAL DRUG BODY FOR PRAGMATIC, EFFECTIVE HIV PREVENTION MEASURES

International Narcotics Control Board should stop baseless fear-mongering

TORONTO, February 28, 2007 — Programs that reduce the spread of HIV should be praised and promoted, not criticized and condemned, said the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network in response to a report being released tomorrow by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

“Ottawa’s safer crack kits and Vancouver’s safe injection facility are examples of sound measures that can prevent HIV,” said Joanne Csete, Executive Director of the Legal Network. “The INCB’s criticisms of such programs are unsubstantiated opinions that don’t hold up to either scientific or legal analysis.”

In its annual report for 2006, the INCB — the UN-funded body responsible for monitoring compliance with UN drug conventions — rebukes Canada for allowing public health authorities in cities such as Ottawa, Winnipeg and Toronto to distribute safer crack kits, which can reduce the risk of HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) transmission. (Smoking crack cocaine can lead to lip abrasions, meaning crack smokers may be at risk of blood-borne infectious diseases when sharing crack pipes. Experience indicates that safer crack kits may lead some people who inject crack to smoke it instead, further reducing HIV and HCV risk.)

The report also criticizes several countries, including Canada, for allowing safe injection facilities (SIFs), such as Insite in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

“Internationally recognized, peer-reviewed evaluations of Insite, and facilities like it around the world, prove that safe injection sites reduce practices leading to HIV and hepatitis transmission, steer people to treatment for their addictions, and prevent death from drug overdose,” said Csete. “But the INCB continues to insist that these facilities violate UN drug conventions, even though UN legal experts have said they do not.”

This latest annual report continues the INCB's long-standing practice of publicizing statements and stances that undercut proven practices to address HIV/AIDS among people who use drugs.

Just yesterday, the Legal Network and the Open Society Institute released *Closed to Reason: The International Narcotics Control Board and HIV/AIDS*, a report documenting the INCB's harmful influence on the global response to HIV/AIDS. The report reveals how the INCB's positions frequently contradict the HIV policies and commitments of other UN bodies, and how the INCB's lack of accountability and transparency allows these positions to go unchallenged. The report is available at www.aidslaw.ca/publications.

"Until the INCB is held to account, many countries will continue to use its pronouncements to justify failed drug strategies that deny HIV prevention and treatment services to people who desperately need them," said Csete.

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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