

For immediate release

## **THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN PRISONS AT ALBERTA HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE**

**TORONTO, March 4, 2009** — Richard Elliott, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, will be speaking at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Alberta Harm Reduction Conference on the rights of people who use drugs, including prison needle and syringe programs.

This presentation, which will include personal perspectives from prisoners, will take place at 10:30 a.m. MT on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, at the Ramada Hotel and Conference Centre. For details, please see: [www.albertaharmreduction.ca](http://www.albertaharmreduction.ca).

Some of the noteworthy elements will include:

- According to international law commitments, prisoners have a right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health;
- Corrections Services Canada must take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity;
- HIV prevalence in the Canadian prison population is higher than in society;
- Some prisoners use drugs. Many of them use unsafe methods to inject drugs. Given that 95% of prisoners will eventually be released back into the community, this is a grave health concern;
- Needle and Syringe Programs (NSP) have been used successfully in prisons since 1992 in several countries around the world. Evidence shows no negative consequences, no increase in drug use or injecting, and no reports of syringes used as weapons in any prison with an NSP; and
- Harm reduction measures aimed at preventing HIV transmission in prisons are not new in Canada but since last September, there has been a freeze and the current approach is a recipe for disaster.

In addition to the above presentation, Mr. Elliott will also be the conference's closing speaker at 2:45 p.m. MT on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Elliott will outline how existing Canadian law against discrimination can be used to challenge discrimination against people with dependence on drugs. He will also look at whether and how the law might

be used — or might need to be changed — to protect more broadly against discrimination faced by people who use drugs, whether or not they are dependent.

If you are unable to attend either of the above, Mr. Elliott would be pleased to give you an interview, schedule permitting.

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For more information, please contact:

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