



**Canada's HIV Vaccine Initiative:
An open letter from Canadian organizations fighting HIV/AIDS**

March 2010

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Mr. Bill Gates
Co-Chair and Trustee
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
PO Box 23350
Seattle, WA 98102

Dear Sirs:

In August 2006, it was announced that the Government of Canada and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation would be collaborating to strengthen global efforts to accelerate the development of HIV vaccines, with the creation of the Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative (CHVI). Launched in February 2007, the CHVI is described by the government as “an inclusive, global collaboration involving developed and developing countries, researchers, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and governments.”

As part of this initiative, in April 2008 the Government of Canada and the Foundation invited applications from not-for-profit corporations to establish a pilot-scale manufacturing facility in Canada that could produce vaccines for clinical trials, as a contribution to this search. On February 19th of this year, it was announced that a review found that none of the applicants were successful in meeting the pre-established criteria, and furthermore that such a facility is not needed at this time to meet research needs. The announcement indicated that:

“Moving forward, the Government of Canada and the Gates Foundation will continue to work together to fund HIV prevention and remain committed to the previously announced funding levels over five years - up to \$111 million from the Government of Canada and up to \$28 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Both parties remain committed to accelerating the development of safe, effective, accessible and affordable HIV vaccines, as one of our key priorities.

Given the importance of our objectives, we are examining all options and will take the time needed to ensure that the direction we take and the activities we choose to support yield the best possible results. Further details will be provided once the areas of investment have been further defined.”

It is our understanding from discussions with government officials that \$88 million was the sum earmarked for the manufacturing facility (over a 5-year period), which monies now need to be reallocated.

We are people living with HIV, researchers, service-providers and community organizations working to prevent the spread of HIV and ensure care, treatment and support for those living with HIV, here at home and abroad. We call on you to ensure that these funds will remain committed to strengthening the response to HIV, and to ensure that civil society organizations working in HIV/AIDS are meaningfully involved in the process of determining how these funds are reallocated.

In particular, we call on you to ensure that these funds are used as follows:

- **Return portion of funds to the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS:** According to figures from the Public Health Agency of Canada, a total of \$26 million committed to the Canadian HIV Vaccines Initiative was diverted from the pre-existing Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS, at the expense of initiatives that would otherwise have been supported. Those funds should be returned to the Federal Initiative envelope, in keeping with the original commitments made in 2004 to sustain funding for the Federal Initiative at a minimum of \$84.4 million annually. This figure reflects the funding recommendation made unanimously in 2003 by all parties on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, following extensive study of the need to strengthen Canada's federal AIDS strategy.
- **Strengthen support for new HIV prevention technologies:** Canada has in the past been a strong and important supporter of international research into the development of new HIV prevention technologies that are much needed, including vaccines and microbicides. If CHVI funds will now not be spent on a vaccine manufacturing facility that is deemed unnecessary, then the balance of funds remaining, after restoring that portion diverted from the Federal Initiative, should still be dedicated to supporting research into HIV prevention technologies and initiatives that will be of global benefit. We are ready to provide various recommendations about how these funds can be allocated.

For Canada and the world, 2010 is a year of opportunities that can and should be seized by the Government, working in collaboration with community organizations, to make real progress in saving lives and making a healthier nation and world. This year is the deadline for achieving the global goal of "universal access" to measures for preventing HIV and caring for those living with HIV — a target first adopted by the G8 countries at their 2005 summit and later by all member countries of the United Nations. This is the year Canada will host the G8 and G20 Summits, at which global health must be a critical part of the agenda, followed soon thereafter by the XVIII International AIDS Conference, at which the urgent need to mobilize global resources for the AIDS response will be front and centre. This is the year that donor countries must come together at the upcoming replenishment conference to sustain and expand the Global Fund in continuing its life-saving work. And at the UN this year, countries will meet to determine what must

happen in the next 5 years to meet by 2015 the Millennium Development Goals adopted by Canada and all UN countries at the turn of the century.

We fully support Canada making a major contribution to the response to HIV, including advancing the development of new, effective HIV prevention options. Given the announcement that a key anticipated component of the CHVI will now not proceed, we call you on to ensure these resources are dedicated in keeping with the spirit of strengthening the fight against HIV/AIDS, here at home and abroad.

Endorsed by:

Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network
Canadian AIDS Society
Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange
Canadian Association for HIV Research
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Canadian Public Health Association
Canadian Treatment Action Council
Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation
CIHR Canadian HIV Trials Network
Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development

Also endorsed by:

Action Positive VIH/sida (Toronto, ON)
AIDS ACTION NOW ! (Toronto, ON)
AIDS Calgary (Calgary, AB)
AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo & Area (Kitchener, ON)
AIDS Committee of Ottawa (Ottawa, ON)
AIDS Committee of Toronto (Toronto, ON)
AIDS Community Care Montréal (Montréal, QC)
AIDS New Brunswick / Sida Nouveau Brunswick (Fredericton & Bathurst, NB)
AIDS Vancouver (Vancouver, BC)
ANKORS (Nelson, BC)
Asian Community AIDS Services (Toronto, ON)
British Columbia Persons with AIDS Society (Vancouver, BC)
Bruce House (Ottawa, ON)
Canadian Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (Pontypool, ON)
Canadian Support of Rural African Initiatives (Toronto, ON)
Central Alberta AIDS Network Society (Red Deer, AB)
Coalition des organismes communautaires Québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-sida)
(Montréal, QC)
Daughters of Africa International Inc. (Regina, SK)
Dopamine (Montréal, QC)

Groupe d'entraide à l'Intention des Personnes Séropositives et Itinérantes (GEIPSI) (Montréal, QC)
Groupe d'action pour la prévention de la transmission du VIH et l'Éradication du sida (GAP-VIES) (Montréal, QC)
Health Initiative for Men (Vancouver, BC)
HIV West Yellowhead (Jasper, AB)
HIV/AIDS Regional Services (Kingston, ON)
L'A.R.C.H.E. de l'Estrie (Sherbrooke, QC)
Les Hébergements de l'Envol (Montréal, QC)
London Regional AIDS Hospice/John Gordon Home (London, ON)
Mouvement d'Aide et d'Information Sida (MAINS) (Bas St-Laurent, QC)
Mouvement d'information et d'entraide dans la lutte contre le VIH-sida à Québec (MIELS-Québec)
Northern HIV and Health Education Society (Prince George, BC)
Ottawa Coalition on HIV/AIDS (Ottawa, ON)
Pacific AIDS Network (Vancouver, BC)
Peel HIV/AIDS Network (Mississauga, ON)
Positively Africa (Victoria, BC)
Prisoners' HIV/AIDS Support and Action Network (Toronto, ON)
South Asian AIDS Prevention (Toronto, ON)
Stella (Montréal, QC)
Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (Toronto, ON)
United Church of Canada (Toronto, ON)