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BILL S-10 HURTS PEOPLE, FAMILIES AND PUBLIC COFFERS ***Over 200 experts call on Senators to be sensible on crime***

Toronto, 6 October 2010 — Over 200 frontline organizations, public health professionals, researchers and experts — working with people who use drugs and those vulnerable to HIV infection — have endorsed a letter calling on the federal government to get sensible, rather than tough on crime.

This action comes as the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs deliberates this week on whether to hold hearings on Bill S-10 (*an Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts*). The letter — endorsed by the Committee's own former co-chair, Senator Pierre Claude Nolin — urges Committee members to respond to the public health problem of drug addiction by focusing on scientifically proven approaches instead of demonstrably ineffective ones, such as mandatory minimum sentences. If the Committee chooses not to hold hearings, crucial expert testimony may never be heard.

“As currently drafted, Bill S-10 would target the most marginalized people living with addictions, whose only engagement with trafficking is often related to their drug dependence,” said Patricia Allard, Deputy Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “Additionally, a Canadian study found that over 80 percent of federally incarcerated women are mothers of minor children. Are child-service agencies prepared for the number of legal orphans likely to land on their doorsteps should S-10 see the light of day?”

“The 30-year war on drugs waged by the U.S. government, and its disastrous experiments with mandatory sentencing, offer all the evidence we need that incarcerating people for minor drug offences is counterproductive to addressing the issue of addiction and is detrimental to public health,” stated Walter Cavalieri, Chair of the Canadian Harm Reduction Network.

According to Ms. Allard, “evidence shows that imprisoning people who inject drugs fans the flames of Canada’s HIV epidemic. The HIV prevalence rate in Canadian prisons is at least 10 times that found in the population as a whole.”

“Our coffers are clearly not safe with the current government,” said Cavalieri. “No thorough fiscal impact assessment of Bill S-10 has been completed, but it’s likely to slam not only the federal but also the provincial and territorial budgets.”

To read the letter, visit www.aidslaw.ca/bills10.

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About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

Since 1992, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) has been promoting 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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