



World AIDS Day 2010: An open letter to Canada's Members of Parliament

December 1, 2010

Dear Member of Parliament,

On World AIDS Day, we are writing to ask you to place people before politics and support an initiative that will make a tangible difference in the lives of people in developing countries.

Last week, the United Nations released its annual report on the state of the global AIDS epidemic. It highlights both that significant progress can be and has been made in confronting the epidemic. Yet the disease continues to have devastating consequences for tens of millions of people around the world. Consider that in 2009 there were:

- 33.3 million people living with HIV – almost equivalent to the population of Canada;
- 2.6 million people newly infected with HIV – 7000 a day;
- 1.8 million people who died of AIDS, including 260,000 children; and
- 97% of people who died from AIDS were in low- and middle-income countries.

They die not because life-saving medicines do not exist. They die because these medicines aren't available to them and to their countries, at prices they can afford, because of limited budgets and overwhelming needs. They die because they are too poor to buy the medicines that those of us in wealthy countries such as Canada so often take for granted. Those medicines have meant deaths from AIDS have dropped dramatically in the last decade. With effective treatment, people with HIV are living, working, studying and being active members of their communities.

But in the developing world, 14.6 million people with HIV need treatment under international guidelines from the World Health Organization, and only 5.2 million – or 36% of those in need – are receiving it. For children with HIV, access to treatment is even worse. In sub-Saharan Africa, roughly half of all children born with HIV will die before reaching their second birthday because they don't have access to medicines.

The fact is these deaths *are* preventable and Canada can help prevent them – if there is the political will to help make medicines available to those in need, including by fixing Canada's broken Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR) to supply generic medicines at more affordable prices.

Competition by generic manufacturers in the global marketplace has been the single most important factor driving down the prices of medicines to bring them within reach. Indeed, without access to low-cost generic medicines, the tremendous success in recent years of quickly and dramatically scaling up the number of people receiving life-saving AIDS drugs would not have been possible. Yet even as we are seeing the results of globally scaling up access to affordable generics, this progress is now being jeopardized. Global funding to prevent and treat AIDS, and to strengthen health systems, is being flat-lined. Meanwhile, there are growing challenges to the future supply of affordable generic medicines for developing countries. These make it all the more important that all countries with the capacity to produce such medicines, including Canada, act to make this simple and straightforward.

The question is whether the political will exists in Parliament to make affordable generics available to those in need in the developing world. In 2004, Parliament unanimously passed legislation creating Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR), with this laudable goal. But it has failed: in more than six years, it has resulted in only one licence being issued to authorize the export of one order of only one AIDS drug to one country (Rwanda).

Bill C-393, as supported by members of all parties at second reading, is intended to reform CAMR by creating the "one-licence solution", reducing red tape and making it easier for developing countries and generic manufacturers to utilize it. Detailed arguments in favour of this approach by international legal and health experts can be reviewed at www.aidslaw.ca/camr.

The goal of CAMR reform, and specifically the proposed "one license solution" approach, has been endorsed by dozens of Canadian civil society organizations with direct experience working with people with AIDS in developing countries. It also has the support of more than 80% of Canadians according to a national poll, as well as a growing list of prominent individuals including former Prime Minister Paul Martin, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario James Bartleman, former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa Stephen Lewis, past International President of Médecins Sans Frontières Dr. James Orbinski, former Members of Parliament, leading researchers, faith leaders, artists and numerous members of the Order of Canada.

Bill C-393 – in its original form, before significant changes weakening the bill were passed at the committee stage – has the power to make a significant contribution in the fight against AIDS and other public problems. It meets all of Canada's international legal obligations, including under

WTO rules. It is fair to both generic and brand-name pharmaceutical companies. And it won't cost Canadian taxpayers a penny.

There are three ways you can make a difference to people living with AIDS right now:

1. Commit to voting to restore the "one-licence" solution to Bill C-393 when it comes up for debate at report stage.
2. Consent to transferring sponsorship of Bill C-393 from former MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis to MP Brian Masse.
3. Vote for a Bill C-393 that includes the one-licence solution when it comes up for a final vote at third reading.

Now is the time to act. By supporting CAMR reform you will be keeping Canada's promise to the developing world. You will be directly responsible for saving lives. People in the developing world, including hundreds of thousands of children with HIV and other illnesses, have waited long enough for Canada to fulfill its promise. They don't have time to wait any longer.

Sincerely,

Gerry Barr, President-CEO, Canadian Council for International Co-operation
Andrea Beal and Kathleen Wallace-Deering, Co-Chairs, National Advocacy Committee of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign
Louise Binder, Chair, Canadian Treatment Action Council
David Cox, Executive Director, CIHR Canadian HIV Trials Network
Chris Dendys, Executive Director, RESULTS Canada
Monique Doolittle-Romas, Executive Director, Canadian AIDS Society
Laurie Edmiston, Executive Director, Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange
Richard Elliott, Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Robert Fox, Executive Director, Oxfam Canada
James Fraser, Executive Director, Dignitas International
Anne Gardner, Executive Director, Bracelet of Hope
Claire Holloway Wadhani, Executive Director, Canada Africa Partnership on AIDS
Maija Kagis, Coordinator (Canada), People's Health Movement
Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, President, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines
Gervais L'Heureux, Directeur général, L'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale
Ken Monteith, Executive Director, COCQ-SIDA
Kim Moran, President and CEO, UNICEF Canada
David Morley, President & CEO, Save the Children Canada
Anne Russell, President, Canadian Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Nicci Stein, Executive Director, Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
Karen Takacs, Executive Director, Canadian Crossroads International
Elisse Zack, Executive Director, Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation