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PARLIAMENT FAILS TO FIX LAW TO SAVE LIVES — BILL C-393 STALLED TO DEATH IN SENATE

Statement by concerned civil society organizations working for health and human rights

Ottawa, Friday, March 25, 2011 — We are profoundly disappointed that certain members of the Canadian Senate have not seen fit to swiftly pass Bill C-393 and thereby help save the lives of thousands of people dying of treatable diseases such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in developing countries.

With the drop of the writ, Bill C-393 — passed by a large majority in the House of Commons on March 9, with support from members of all parties — has again died on the Order Paper because of undue politicking. A majority of Senators have decided to reject reason and overwhelming evidence by stalling a bill that would have contributed to greater access to affordable generic medicines for those who continue to needlessly suffer and die.

Bill C-393 would have streamlined Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR) by cutting red tape that is wholly unnecessary and that has proven fatal to the future use of the system. It attracted votes in support from members of all parties in the House of Commons, reaffirming that this should be a non-partisan issue. Bill C-393 had the support of medical and legal experts, humanitarian activists, faith leaders, AIDS and international development organizations across the country and health activists in developing countries. Dozens of prominent Canadians supported the call to action, and 80% of the public supports fixing CAMR according to a national opinion poll. Recently, more than 70,000 Canadians have taken the time to sign a petition, or to email and call their MPs and Senators, urging support for Bill C-393.

It is a travesty that the Government, having made much of its initiative on maternal and child health, would now turn its back on an opportunity to help people dying of treatable diseases — and in a fashion that would cost no taxpayer money and, in fact, would make Canada's foreign aid dollars even more effective. It is sad irony that non-governmental organizations have had to make the case for harnessing the power of competition in the market, which competition has been proven to reduce the cost of medicines for dying people in developing countries.

The bottom line is this: after nearly seven years of waiting for Canada to deliver on its pledge to help get more affordable medicines to Africa and other developing countries, the world will still have to wait — and people will die preventable deaths because too many Senators did not have the courage to do the right thing.

Signatories:

Bracelet of Hope

Canadian Treatment Action Council
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Canadian Crossroads International
Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation
CIHR Canadian HIV Trials Network
Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida
Dignitas International
Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
National Advocacy Committee of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign
People's Health Movement Canada
RESULTS Canada
Save the Children Canada
Universities Allied for Essential Medicines

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