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STATEMENT ON THE PASSING OF JACK LAYTON, LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

August 22, 2011 — It is with great sadness that the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network learned today of the death of Jack Layton, Member of Parliament, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada and Leader of the Official Opposition.

For decades, in both municipal and federal politics, Jack was a friend and ally to people living with HIV or AIDS and to various communities particularly hard hit by the epidemic. He was a fighter for human rights and social justice on many fronts of great relevance in the struggle against AIDS. From the beginning, he spoke out against homophobia and demonstrated time and again his support for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. He defended public health and other services that make communities safer and healthier. He championed Aboriginal rights and women's rights, and called for humane and fair immigration policy. He questioned the folly of a wasteful and damaging "war on drugs" rather than investing in proven measures to reduce harms associated with drugs to individuals and communities.

Jack's commitment to social justice was global, including a desire to see Canada use its financial and diplomatic resources to support health and development internationally. In recent years, we were grateful for Jack's personal support and leadership within his party and in Parliament in staunchly supporting reforms to fix Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR). Passed 7 years ago, CAMR was intended to support developing countries in need of more affordable medicines to address AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other public health problems, but it has failed to deliver on that unanimous pledge by Parliament. A bill to make CAMR work passed third reading with a strong majority in the House of Commons in the last Parliament, before being stalled and then dying on the Order Paper in the Senate when the recent federal election was called. Having just had surgery, Jack nonetheless travelled to Ottawa specifically so he could be sure to vote in support of the bill, whose fate was uncertain.

We wish to recall his dedication to making Canada and the world a better place. Our deepest condolences to his wife, MP Olivia Chow — herself a longtime and staunch supporter of human rights for people living with HIV and AIDS and affected communities — and to his family and other loved ones.