

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew
The Honourable Anne McLellan
The Honourable William Graham

Dear Ministers,

We write this letter on behalf of the undersigned organizations and the hundreds of thousands of constituents that they represent, in order to express our concern regarding the Canadian Government's stance on the global HIV epidemic.

We write to you as citizens of a prosperous and democratic nation who are dismayed that our government has inadequately responded to the cries of the developing world in facing the greatest health crisis of modern times.

We write to you as voters who want to make it plain that providing HIV-infected people around the world with access to treatment is an issue dear to us.

Most importantly, however, we write this letter in solidarity with the millions of human beings for whom HIV therapy is kept out of reach for unconscionable reasons in what amounts to an attack against the world's poor. The fact that millions die of a disease for which treatments exist reflects a failure of our society, the immorality of having an entirely profit-driven pharmaceutical industry, and a deficiency in our humanity.

We write this letter in solidarity with the millions of people who die every year because they are denied access to the HIV medicines that are readily available to us.

We write because we can no longer participate in what amounts to a "holocaust against the world's poor."¹

Well over 40 million people are infected with HIV; without an adequate response, not only will 3 million people continue to die every year, but the prevalence will hit 60 million by 2007 in Africa alone. The millions of premature deaths are destroying labour forces and economies, and leaving *millions* of orphans with no one to care for them. It is horrendous that donors have only pledged \$2 billion to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria, and that only \$700 million will be available for disbursement this year. This falls well short of the \$10 billion the Fund needs every year to fight these three scourges that claim 6 million lives annually. We are shocked that Canada, called on to donate \$257 million (U.S.), has contributed a paltry \$100 million.²

For too long, the dogma for confronting the HIV epidemic has been treatment for the rich, prevention for the poor. Billions of dollars have been poured solely into prevention efforts- the statistics above are a testament to the inherent deficiencies of this strategy. Not only does HIV treatment offer hope to those already afflicted by the virus, but research has consistently shown that offering treatment is an integral part of effective prevention strategies.

For too long, the multinational pharmaceutical industry has been allowed to reap record profits by charging exorbitant prices for effective treatments. They have withheld lifesaving medications from millions. The complete absence of regulation on pharmaceutical pricing has paralyzed the developing world's capacity to purchase effective treatments. The imposition of strict patent regimes through the TRIPS Agreement and the Free Trade Area of the Americas will exacerbate the present drug access crisis.

For too long, Canada has represented the interests of the pharmaceutical industry at the negotiations on implementing measures to safeguard public health that followed the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement.

We are fully aware of the very real consequences of these actions: millions of deaths, millions of orphans and further socio-economic devastation for millions of the world's poorest humans.

To confront the global HIV epidemic, we call on the Canadian government to immediately:

- Increase its annual contribution to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria to a minimum of \$257 million US dollars (based on UN Assessments);
- Allocate *new* funds to research HIV interventions that focus on the provision of free antiretroviral treatment to poor populations in developing countries in addition to prevention efforts;

¹ Pan African HIV/AIDS Treatment Action Coalition Declaration of Action (2002).

² France, T et al. "The GFATM: Which countries owe, and how much?" *LAPAC Monthly* - Vol. 8, No. 5, May 2002.

- Provide financial and political support to nations that are seeking to provide universal antiretroviral treatment to infected populations;
- Provide incentives and support to Canadian manufacturers of generic pharmaceuticals who wish to produce antiretroviral drugs for export to developing countries at cost;
- Ensure that all international trade agreements signed by the Canadian government maximize every state's ability to provide cheap, generic medicines to its populace without fear of retribution from wealthier nations or pharmaceutical companies;

AND

- To support the policies put forward by developing nations at negotiations on implementing the Doha Declaration on Public Health, and the provisions to safeguard public health within the TRIPS Agreement.

Ministers, future generations will look back at our actions. If we do not deviate from our current path, we will be both witness to and participant in millions of needless deaths and the destruction of an entire continent. Through the adoption of the aforementioned policies, however, we may set a precedent for the world's wealthy nations to fulfill their duty towards the global poor.

Endorsed by:



Canadian Federation of Medical Students



Students' Society of McGill University



University of Toronto Students' Administrative Council



Fédération des associations étudiantes du campus de l'Université de Montréal



Concordia Student Union



University of Manitoba Students' Union



University of Saskatchewan Students' Union



Mount Allison University Students Administrative Council

UNBSU

University of New Brunswick Students' Union



University of Winnipeg's Students' Union



St. Mary's Students' Association



St. Francis Xavier Students' Union



St. Thomas University Students' Union



Wilfred Laurier University Students' Union