



AIDS 2010 to Promote Access to Evidence-based HIV Prevention and Treatment Programmes for People Who Use Drugs

10 March 2010 (Vienna, Austria) – Speaking at a press briefing during the fifty-third session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, organizers of the XVIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010) today highlighted the important role the conference will play in advancing efforts to increase access to programmes proven to lower HIV infection rates and improve access to HIV treatment among people who use drugs.

Participants of the briefing included: Dr. Brigitte Schmied, Local Co-Chair of AIDS 2010 and President of the Austrian AIDS Society; Dr. Julio Montaner, Chair of AIDS 2010, President of the International AIDS Society (IAS) and Director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver, British Columbia; Ms. Robin Gorna, Executive Director of the IAS; Mr. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); and Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The biennial International AIDS Conference is the premier gathering for those working in the field of HIV, as well as policymakers, people living with HIV and others committed to ending the epidemic. AIDS 2010 will take place from 18–23 July 2010 at Vienna’s Reed Messe Wien. The conference theme, *Rights Here, Right Now*, emphasizes the importance of protecting and promoting human rights as a prerequisite to a successful response to AIDS.

The conference’s location in Vienna – a historical bridge between East and West – is an opportunity to invigorate the AIDS response in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), home to an estimated 1.5 million people living with HIV. EECA is the only region in the world experiencing an increase in HIV prevalence, which is fuelled primarily by injecting drug use.

“AIDS 2010 will bring together scientific evidence and the voices of those impacted by drug use and HIV to highlight the urgent need for broader implementation of evidence-based harm reduction initiatives, such as needle exchange programmes and opioid substitution therapy,” said Dr. Montaner. “The conference will also highlight new interventions and research showing the public health impacts of expanded access to HIV treatment, including dramatic reductions in new infections among injecting drug users,” he added.

The effectiveness of opioid substitution therapy (OST) and access to clean needles and syringes is well-documented, though access to such interventions is limited. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), OST reduces HIV prevalence, the risk of HIV transmission and infection with other blood borne viruses, including Hepatitis C, while also reducing the proportion of users who inject drugs and the frequency of infection. Studies also show that use of OST among people who inject opioids is associated with improved social

functioning, integration into the workforce and education system, as well as substantial reduction in criminal activity.

For those infected with HIV, OST increases access and adherence to antiretroviral therapy. WHO also concluded that there is compelling evidence that increasing the availability and utilization of sterile injecting equipment by people who inject drugs reduces substantially the spread of HIV. The programmes are cost-effective, have no convincing evidence of unintended negative consequences, and show evidence of increasing recruitment into drug treatment.

AIDS 2010 is expected to increase awareness of HIV's impact in all regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, home to two-thirds of the estimated 33.4 million people living with HIV in 2008. Globally, AIDS is the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age.

"This is an historic opportunity to strengthen the global commitment to human rights – including equal access to health care and life-saving HIV prevention and treatment programmes – especially for key affected populations such as women, people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men and sex workers," said Dr. Schmieid. "The conference is also an opportunity for Vienna and the Viennese people to demonstrate once more their outstanding hospitality and commitment to this global issue," she added.

With the 2010 deadline that world leaders set for ensuring access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for all those who need it fast approaching, conference organizers also emphasized the need for a renewed commitment to the goal of universal access as political support for financing the scale-up of HIV programmes is waning.

"With an estimated 25,000 participants, including more than 2,000 media, AIDS 2010 will be a critical opportunity to identify what must be done, both individually and collectively, to achieve universal access to HIV prevention and treatment," said Robin Gorna, Executive Director of the IAS. "This is a goal first set by wealthy nations in 2005, from which we cannot afford to walk away," she added.

Media representatives are encouraged to register online for AIDS 2010 at www.aids2010.org. During the conference, online programming will offer access to the full text of scientific abstracts, as well as speaker slides and webcasts of all major sessions.

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About the AIDS 2010 Organizers

The biennial International AIDS Conference is convened by the International AIDS Society (IAS), the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals with more than 14,000 members from 190 countries. Local and regional partners include the City of Vienna, the Government of Austria, Austrian AIDS Society, Aids Hilfe Wien, the East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH (ECUO), the European AIDS Clinical Society, the European Commission and local scientific leadership. International partners for AIDS 2010 include: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), including its co-sponsors, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); International Council of AIDS Service Organizations; Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS/International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS; World YWCA; and Caribbean Vulnerable Communities.

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