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SCIENTISTS WARN AGAINST RETRENCHMENT ON AIDS

As 5th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention Opens, Leaders Urge Continued Momentum Towards Universal Access in Africa and Globally

(19 July 2009 – Cape Town, South Africa) Amidst a lingering global recession and indications that world leaders are retreating on previous commitments to universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, the more than 5,000 AIDS researchers, implementers and community leaders gathered in Cape Town for the 5th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2009) warned of dire public health consequences resulting from a retrenchment on the global fight against AIDS. This warning came at the opening of IAS 2009, a biennial scientific meeting organized by the International AIDS Society (IAS) in partnership with Dira Sengwe.

“Despite the recession, the global response to HIV – including the commitment of sufficient resources to achieve universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, fully fund AIDS research and strengthen underlying health systems – cannot be put in a holding pattern,” said IAS President Dr. Julio Montaner, who is IAS 2009 Chair and Director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver, Canada. “If we don’t move forward, we will rapidly lose ground. That is the reality we face at this pivotal moment in HIV scale-up,” he added.

For IAS 2009 Local Co-Chair Dr. Hoosen (Jerry) Coovadia, the conference is taking place at the right time and place. “Without a doubt, AIDS occupies a pivotal position in South Africa’s history, having helped to frame our country’s political, social and economic life in the post-apartheid era,” he said. “With reports of interruptions in drug supply and shortages here and elsewhere foremost on our minds, we must ensure that health delivery systems on our continent are effective and adequately funded in order to prevent needless deaths and countless preventable infections,” he added. Dr. Coovadia is Chairman of Dira Sengwe and Scientific Director of the Doris Duke Medical Research Institute at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban.

The IAS Conference series focuses on the translation of research into practice, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This emphasis is further reflected this year by the addition of a new conference track on operations research, which involves the ongoing evaluation of programme implementation to strengthen service delivery and identify best practice. The notion of “learning by doing” will be the focus of a number of conference sessions.

Opening Programme

The emphasis on the real-world application of science was also reflected in today’s opening session, which began with welcoming remarks by the conference Co-Chairs and South Africa’s Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, followed by a community welcome by Viyuseka Dubula, General Secretary of the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa. In her remarks, Ms. Dubula highlighted progress and challenges since the XIII International AIDS Conference took place in Durban in 2000, an event that is widely credited with having focused global attention on geographic disparities in HIV treatment and jumpstarting the move to expand access in low-income countries.

The opening session also featured a scientific keynote address by 2008 Nobel Laureate and IAS Governing Council member Professor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi entitled, *Can the Establishment and Persistence of HIV Reservoirs Ever be Controlled?* Viral reservoirs – hidden mostly in

subpopulations of latently infected resting memory CD4+ T cells – constitute the major obstacle to eliminating HIV from the body. In her remarks, Prof. Barré-Sinoussi explained how HIV persists in patients treated with highly active antiretroviral therapy and posed some of the most vexing questions facing AIDS scientists and clinicians today, including: What are the main reservoirs of HIV in the body? What are the mechanisms responsible for their establishment and persistence? Which strategies can be proposed accordingly?

AIDS Free World Co-Director Stephen Lewis gave a second keynote address entitled, *Scientists as Activists*. Mr. Lewis argued that what is desperately needed today is unrelenting and informed voices of advocacy, and he called upon the scientific community to use both their scientific expertise and their voices to respond to the pandemic.

A webcast of the opening session will be available on the conference website as of late Sunday.

Programme to Highlight Other Key Research and Implementation Issues

IAS 2009 will explore issues at the top of the AIDS research and policy agendas, including: the impact of HIV-specific funding on broader efforts to strengthen health systems; disparities in normative guidelines on when to start HIV treatment for people living in the global North versus the South; and the emerging concept of treatment as prevention, which recognizes the added preventive value of antiretroviral therapy. Four special sessions will examine other key issues:

- *Scaling up Biomedical Prevention and Treatment Interventions - The Critical Role of Social Science, Law and Human Rights (Monday, 20 July, 13:00)*
- *U.S. Global HIV Policy, Research and Implementation Under a New Administration, featuring NIAID Director Anthony Fauci and newly confirmed U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Eric Goosby (Monday, 20 July, 13:00)*
- *What Have We Learned from DART (Development of AntiRetroviral Therapy in Africa)? (Tuesday, 21 July, 07:00)*
- *Drug and Alcohol Dependence – New Advances and Ongoing Challenges in HIV Treatment and Prevention (Tuesday, 21 July, 13:00)*

Online Coverage of IAS 2009 at www.ias2009.org

The online [Programme-at-a-Glance](#), available through the website, includes links to all abstracts, as well as webcasts, session slides and speeches (**though all abstract findings are embargoed until date and time of delivery at the conference**). Additional online programming will be provided by the IAS 2009's two official online partners: Clinical Care Options and NAM. Reporters and others can also follow key developments on the IAS 2009 Live blog at www.ias2009live.blogspot.com or on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/IAS2009live>.

About the Organizers

IAS 2009 is organized by the International AIDS Society (IAS) in partnership with Dira Sengwe, a not-for-profit organization based in Pretoria, South Africa. The IAS is the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals, with over 13,000 members in 188 countries working at all levels of the global response to HIV/AIDS. Dira Sengwe originated amongst a group of scientists and activists, who came together to help organize AIDS 2000 in order to bring attention to the plight of people living with HIV in Africa. Since 2003, Dira Sengwe has organized the South African AIDS Conference, one of the largest national AIDS conferences in the world.

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