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5,000 SCIENTISTS, HIV CLINICIANS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CONVENE IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA TO REVIEW IMPORTANT ADVANCES IN HIV RESEARCH

4th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention Opens with Call for Expanded Research to Strengthen Global Scale Up of HIV Prevention, Care and Treatment

Sydney, 22 July 2007 – With important scientific advances setting the stage, the 4th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2007) convenes in Sydney, Australia today, with organizers calling for even greater vigilance to ensure universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, and expanded research to inform and strengthen the global response to HIV. IAS 2007 is hosted by the International AIDS Society (IAS), in partnership with the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM). The conference incorporates the 19th Annual ASHM Conference.

“With fewer than one-third of people living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries having access to life-saving medications, and still fewer with access to proven prevention services, such as condoms and sterile syringes, the goal of universal access by 2010 must remain a priority,” said IAS President Dr. Pedro Cahn, International Conference Co-Chair and Director of Fundación Huesped in Argentina. “Science has given us the tools to prevent and treat HIV effectively. The fact that we have not yet translated this science into practice is a shameful failure.”

Emphasizing that “good research drives good policy and programming,” the IAS and ASHM recently issued the Sydney Declaration, a global sign-on letter that urges governments and donors to allocate 10 per cent of all resources dedicated to HIV programming for research. In their remarks at the Opening Session, the conference co-chairs stressed that new research investments cannot come at the expense of prevention and treatment programmes, and that such investments must not be seen as an additional burden, but as a critical way of determining what works best and why.

“It is our responsibility as researchers, as the drivers of the research locomotives that carry HIV treatments forward, to ensure that clinical and prevention research, as well as capacity building and basic science, continue to thrive in the most affected countries,” said Prof. David Cooper, IAS 2007 Local Co-chair and Director of the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, University of New South Wales. “Funders must understand that good programming can only succeed on the back of solid research.”

Some of the many important scientific findings to be presented and discussed at the conference include:

- The development of novel treatments that offer new hope to persons in whom HIV has developed resistance to existing medications;
- New biomedical prevention strategies available and others on the horizon, such as female-controlled microbicides, male circumcision and the use of antiretrovirals to prevent infection (referred to as pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP);
- New knowledge of HIV pathogenesis and the mechanisms through which HIV causes immune deficiency;
- Operations research detailing what we've learned, to date, about what is working on the ground in communities across the globe; and
- Updates on the clinical implications of an ageing population of people living with HIV, as well as on paediatric treatment issues.

Opening Programme

The IAS 2007 Opening Session, held on Sunday 22 July, began with a dance performance by the Sydney-based Aboriginal ensemble, Descendance Cultural Group. Robert Welsh, Chairperson of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, followed with a welcome to the land.

The Hon. Tony Abbott, Australia's Minister for Health and Ageing, spoke about Australia's role in the fight against the pandemic, confirming that preventing the spread of HIV is a priority for the Australian Government. He also pledged Australia's commitment to offering assistance and scientific advances to inform and strengthen both the domestic and the global response.

Mr. Abbott's State counterpart, New South Wales (NSW) Minister for Health Reba Meagher, said NSW is a leader in HIV/AIDS treatment and research through bipartisan political support and a willingness to work across political, social, disciplinary and professional boundaries. According to Ms. Meagher, a crucial part of her state's success has been the role played by clinicians, not just in providing quality care, but as committed patient advocates. The NSW Government invested nearly \$90 million in 2006/07, and has seen some success through a 17 per cent decrease in new HIV infections over the past 10 years.

In his keynote address, Dr. Michel Kazatchkine, Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, reviewed advances in the global response to AIDS in the last 15 years, including the growing prominence of health on the international development agenda, the demonstrated feasibility of scaling up treatment in resource-constrained settings, new opportunities for HIV prevention and the global mobilization of civil society. He also outlined the major challenges that need to be overcome if the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is to be translated from hope into reality, such as the need for sustainable financing and strategies to address the health workforce crisis.

Ms. Maura Elaripe, President of Women Affected by HIV and AIDS in Papua New Guinea, described the community response to HIV/AIDS. Ms. Elaripe works with a number of prominent HIV organizations in Papua New Guinea (PNG). She is an HIV-positive woman and a nurse, diagnosed with HIV in 1997, and she was one of the first women in PNG to come out publicly about her HIV status. Ms. Elaripe has worked on a range of important advocacy programs, calling on the PNG government and NGOs to make antiretroviral therapy widely available and accessible in PNG. She also advocates for positive women's rights in her country and is an advocate on women's issues generally.

In his keynote address, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) in the United States, reviewed recent advances in understanding the pathogenesis or disease-causing mechanisms of HIV, including the very early events following infection, and the opportunities to build on this knowledge to develop new interventions. He discussed recent successes in treating HIV-infected people in rich and poor countries, as well the many challenges that remain with regard to improving access to existing medications and developing new ones. Dr. Fauci also discussed progress and priorities in HIV prevention, both the importance of scaling-up proven prevention strategies and the critical need to develop new prevention tools such as topical microbicides and vaccines.

Over 5,000 delegates from 133 countries will attend IAS 2007. Over 3,100 original abstracts were submitted for consideration and 978 were accepted for oral or poster presentation. This represents more than a 50 per cent increase in the number of abstracts submitted to IAS 2003 held in Rio de Janeiro in 2005.

For more information about the conference, including details about the programme, visit www.ias2007.org.

About the Organizers:

The **International AIDS Society** (IAS) is the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals, with over 10,000 members from 153 countries (www.iasociety.org). Founded in 1987, the **Australasian Society for HIV Medicine** (ASHM) is one of the first HIV medicine societies in the world (www.ashm.org.au).

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