



This Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, HIV-Positive Women in the U.S. Reflect and Recommit to Upholding the Human Rights of Millions of Women Affected by HIV Around the World

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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March 10, 2010, Oakland, CA -- National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2010 comes just weeks after the United Nations announced that HIV is the leading cause of death among women globally.

In the U.S., a woman tests positive for HIV every 35 minutes, and nearly one-third of all domestic HIV infections are among women -- up from 8% in 1987. AIDS continues to be the leading cause of death among African-American women ages 25 to 34. Yet the general perception is that women are not vulnerable to contracting HIV -- and women are dying as a result.

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Multiple members of the U.S. Positive Women's Network (PWN), a national membership body of women living with HIV in the United States, have personal experience with this issue. "Everyone is at risk for HIV," says Demetra Tennison, Peer Educator at Women Rising Project in Austin, TX. "But many providers don't perceive women as being at risk or are uncomfortable talking about it. I told my doctor that my husband was positive, and he didn't offer me a test. I was diagnosed late and got into care late, because of a missed opportunity on my physician's part."

Advocates specifically call for integration of sexual and reproductive health services with HIV services. "Early HIV diagnosis means less transmission and better health outcomes. Yet we see missed opportunities for HIV prevention and diagnosis throughout the medical system," says Dr. Monica Gandhi, director of HIV Consult Services at San Francisco General Hospital. "Women show up for sexual and reproductive health services multiple times a year. Every one of those appointments -- for pap smears, contraception care, and routine check-ups -- is an opportunity for HIV education, screening for HIV risk factors like domestic violence, and testing."

The PWN also notes that over half of all people living with HIV are not in regular medical care, and that co-location of sexual and reproductive health services with HIV services has enormous potential to transform women's ability to access care.

HIV-positive women across the United States have organized to urge the Obama Administration to finish health care reform, demand a gender-sensitive National HIV/AIDS Strategy, declare HIV an urgent crisis facing women and demand, the immediate appointment of an openly HIV-positive Black woman to the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA). Events will occur in locations as

diverse as Philadelphia, PA; Oakland, CA; San Diego, CA; Washington, NC; Washington, DC; and Boulder, CO.

Advocates also stress that an effective response to the domestic HIV epidemic must address social factors that put some communities at disproportionate risk. "We have the tools to end the HIV epidemic. What we need is political will to address structural issues including homophobia, gender inequity, and the deep racial and economic disparities that drive the rising rates of HIV among our most marginalized communities," says Waheedah Shabazz-El, a Muslim and Philadelphia-based trainer with the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project, who was diagnosed in 2003.

In honor of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, the PWN has launched a survey to track the extent to which HIV-positive women's human rights are being realized in the United States. This survey is the first in a series, and focuses on testing and disclosure, reproductive justice for women with HIV, and the criminalization of HIV. Please take the survey and spread the word!