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THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION / EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### **United States Plan for AIDS Relief**

By Ambassador Reno L. Harnish, III  
November 30, 2004

World AIDS Day is December 1. The people of the United States, through President George W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, have taken on a leadership role in this fight, providing an unprecedented \$15 billion for the fight. The entire world community must take up this cause with a new level of urgency.

The U.S. plan is the largest commitment ever by a nation toward an international health initiative for a single disease, and we are now urgently employing the best practices available to fight this disease and bring hope.

The American people have invested \$2.4 billion in the fight this year - more than all other donor governments combined -- and will provide even more this coming year. America is working with our partners in-country and supporting national strategies to extend lives and ameliorate the suffering caused by HIV/AIDS worldwide.

Bilateral U.S. programs combat the disease in more than 100 countries. Our strategy places a special emphasis on 15 nations in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia that represent approximately half of the world's infections.

This year's World AIDS Day observance focuses on women and girls. The U.S. is making sure that women benefit from our HIV prevention, treatment, and care work. For example, we have programs aimed at preventing mother-to-child-transmission, preventing sexual violence and exploitation, and helping men and boys to develop healthy relationships with women.

International cooperation is also central to the U.S. strategy. In 2001, the U.S. helped create the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. The American people provided its founding contribution, and remain by far its largest donor nation today.

The Fund offers a vehicle for nations to deepen their commitment, as the U.S. has, and we are working with the Fund to fulfill that promise. We also work closely with other donors and international organizations, such as The United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Together, in each country where we work, we are implementing the "Three Ones" (One National Plan, One National Coordinating Authority, and One National Monitoring and Evaluation System). Achieving this level of cooperation is never easy. But we simply must spend our resources on defeating HIV/AIDS, not on wasteful duplication. Step by step, we are building a more effective effort.

According to the UNAID/WHO report AIDS Epidemic Update, December 2004, the steepest increases in HIV/AIDS are in East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia more than 80% of HIV/AIDS cases are in people under 30, compares to only 30% in that age group in Western Europe. As for Azerbaijan, the report says that one in four street drug injectors in Baku is HIV positive. About 11% of commercial sex workers on the streets in Baku are HIV positive, while 6% of those working out of cafes and saunas are HIV positive. UNAID goes on to say "because the epidemics are in their early states, they can be halted with prevention strategies that concentrate on those most at risk for HIV." But awareness is crucial. In a study of young women aged 15-24, those who knew the three HIV prevention methods was under 10% in Azerbaijan. Only Tajikistan fared worse in this survey. The HIV/AIDS problem in Azerbaijan is in the early stages. Azerbaijan has the opportunity now, through training and education, to promote better understanding and control the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Working towards this end, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as part of their Reproductive Health/Family Planning project, has provided awareness training about HIV/AIDS to over 50,000 people through their training on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's). Another USAID program, the Development Resource Center, facilitated health days to raise awareness on several health issues, including HIV/AIDS. A technical team is currently assessing the capacity of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Health to manage an HIV/AIDS Global Fund grant. If received, this grant would provide \$11 million over the next 5 years for HIV/AIDS training and prevention.

Now is the time for all the nations of the world to come together in a spirit of dramatically increased commitment - including resources -- to stop HIV/AIDS. The American people are playing our part, working together with all who share the goal of turning the tide against HIV/AIDS. There is no time to lose.