



Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

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Press statement

UNAIDS WELCOMES CANADA'S MOVE TO IMPLEMENT WTO PACT ON GENERIC MEDICINES

Geneva, 10 November 2003 -- UNAIDS today welcomed draft legislation introduced by the Canadian government that would amend the country's patent laws to allow drug makers to manufacture and export lower-cost generic medicines to developing countries.

The move means that Canada becomes the first G8 government to undertake legislative reform to implement a pact agreed in August by members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to help developing countries protect public health and ensure access to medicines, including medicines for people living with HIV. If the legislation is passed, companies in Canada will be able to produce generic versions of antiretroviral drugs for HIV and export them to developing countries that do not presently have the capacity to manufacture the medicines themselves. In many of these countries, HIV medicines are urgently needed. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region worst affected by the epidemic, UNAIDS estimates that only 1% of people living with HIV/AIDS who are in need of treatment have access to these drugs.

"We applaud Canada's rapid action" said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director. "It is vital that we increase global manufacturing capacity to provide accessible HIV drugs to the millions of people who need them."

Canada's move is part of a growing global movement now underway to dramatically scale up the world's response to the AIDS epidemic, which includes the new United States Government's global AIDS initiative, the "3x5" initiative launched by WHO and UNAIDS, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, the Clinton Foundation and the pharmaceutical industry.

"We must now prioritize greater coordination and collaboration of multilateral and bilateral donors, the private sector, NGOs and groups of people living with HIV/AIDS to support national governments in meeting the challenge of providing HIV therapy on this scale," added Dr Piot.

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