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Sec. Clinton Announces Bold Vision for AIDS-free Generation; Plan is Short on Answers for Women

WASHINGTON, Nov. 8, 2011—In a speech today at the National Institutes of Health, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlined a global AIDS strategy that envisions an end to AIDS through evidence-based approaches, including addressing gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls; however, her speech sidelined key strategies to meet the needs of women. Women now account for more than half of the world’s population living with HIV and 64 percent of people receiving treatment via the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Yet the plan Secretary Clinton discussed focused on a combination approach to end AIDS centered on male circumcision, prevention of vertical transmission (transmission from parent to infant), and treatment as prevention.

“Sec. Clinton’s focus on combination prevention is commendable; however, the central components stressed in her speech either make women an afterthought or treat them as vectors of transmission. Have no doubt we will lose this fight if we don’t put women’s sexual and reproductive health and human rights at the center of the response,” said Serra Sippel, president of the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). “While we appreciate that the Secretary is undoubtedly committed to the human rights of women, as demonstrated by her acknowledgment of the need to reduce gender-based violence and discrimination, women are more than victims of violence. They are more than half of the population living with HIV, and they will not be adequately protected by programs to prevent transmission to newborns, male circumcision to prevent infections among men, or treatment as prevention without unfettered access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

“If we intend to sincerely address HIV, our comprehensive approach has to promote dual prevention methods like female and male condoms, integrate family planning, and advance women’s rights. Like Sec. Clinton said, our HIV response has to be evidence-based, and the evidence is telling us that women are the majority of the population living with HIV, and that

sexual contact is still the most common way HIV is transmitted. If we're not focusing on women, family planning, and sexual and reproductive rights, we're missing the mark entirely.”

The Global Health Initiative (GHI), announced by President Obama in 2009, cites a woman- and girl-centered approach as a guiding principle of effective, sustainable HIV policies and programs.

About the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization that seeks to ensure that U.S. foreign policies and programs promote sexual and reproductive health and rights through effective, evidence-based approaches to prevention and treatment of critical reproductive and sexual health concerns, and through increased funding for critical international programs and institutions. www.genderhealth.org