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***Female Condoms Remain Underfunded, Ignored by Donors, Governments
Microbicide Potential Promising for Prevention Options for Women, Yet Proven-
Effective And Life-Saving Tool Undermined By Bias And Stigma***

VIENNA/AIDS 2010, July 20, 2010—HIV/AIDS and women’s health advocates today at the International AIDS Conference welcomed news about a partially-effective microbicide, yet scrutinized the gross lack of funding and policy support from international donors and governments for female condoms, a critical woman-initiated tool in fighting the HIV epidemic that is already available.

“As a woman, I am really happy about the news about microbicides, but as an HIV positive woman it is too late for me. HIV positive women still have sex. If you have access to a female condom, you can protect your partner, and you can protect yourself from reinfection and unwanted pregnancy,” said Carol Nawina Nyrienda, national coordinator of the Community Initiative for TB, HIV/AIDS & Malaria (CITAM+), Zambia.

Nyrienda, who contracted HIV from her husband, underscored the need for a woman-initiated protection option.

“We cannot depend on our partners to save our own lives,” she said.

“Women all over the world have expressed a demand for the female condom; however, donors and governments have yet to respond with corresponding funding and program support. While the United States government has increased its investment in female condoms, more significant resources are needed to achieve a woman-focused approach to HIV/AIDS, which has been identified by UNAIDS as the key to making progress against the epidemic,” said Serra Sippel, president of the Center for Health and Gender Equity, a U.S.-based advocacy organization.

“Investment has to be made in programming. Women and men need information about how to use female condoms, how to negotiate their use, and about anatomy,” said Lucie van Mens, coordinator of the Universal Access to Female Condoms Joint Programme. “This is particularly urgent in sub-Saharan Africa. Women make up an estimated 60 percent of adults are living with the virus, yet female condoms are only available at a rate of one for every 300 women per year. We have to approach the HIV/AIDS epidemic with women in mind, and female condoms are a critical component to that.”

Jim Clarcken, head of the Oxfam delegation at the International AIDS Conference, added, “Female condoms are vitally important in the fight against HIV and AIDS, particularly as they empower women to take the initiative in their own sexual health.”

Advocates at the press conference also noted that further research and development is needed in order to diversify the market and reduce cost.

Their policy recommendations include:

- Governments should promote female condom procurement and programming within development programs.
- Governments should increase investment in female condom programming, and create a system for tracking such funds.

- All funding directives from governments and donors should recommend comprehensive, integrated, and evidence-based HIV prevention programs that include female condoms and promote women's health.
- Investments should be made toward further research and development of female condoms with in order to increase variety and choice and decrease cost.

The press conference was sponsored by the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) and the Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) Joint Programme. Prior to the conference, dozens of women and men from around the world joined in enthusiastic chants through conference hallways demanding access to female condoms. One participant said, "I am here because I cannot get access to female condoms in my country. It's a matter of justice and rights."

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. international 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. For more information, visit www.genderhealth.org

About Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) Joint Programme

The UAFC Joint Programme aims at making the female condom available for an affordable and sustainable price and promotes variety and choice. UAFC Joint Programme is a partnership between four Dutch organisations: Oxfam Novib, World Population Foundation, i+solutions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands. In Nigeria and Cameroon, there are large scale UAFC country programmes with the aim to create demand for the female condom. The Nigerian program is lead by

the Society for Family Health (SFH) and the program in Cameroon by Association
Camerounaise pour le Marketing Social (ACMS). For more information visit

www.condoms4all.org

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