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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STORIES AND SOLUTIONS

The Global AIDS Alliance (GAA) commends Chairman Delahunt and the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight for their dedication to addressing global violence against women and girls (VAWG). As an organization focused on halting the spread of HIV worldwide and addressing its impacts on families, communities and global society, GAA is also committed to halting the spread of VAWG and addressing its consequences. Violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of HIV/AIDS, and an issue the global AIDS movement views as an integral component of our fight. Hearings are an essential first step to raising awareness and securing commitment, but hearings alone are insufficient to effect the change we know is needed using the tools we know can work. As such, GAA urges comprehensive and coordinated action to respond to this life-and-death issue, beginning with urgent passage and full funding of the forthcoming International Violence against Women Act (I-VAWA). The efforts supported by the I-VAWA will not only galvanize the global health, women's, children's and human rights movements, but will help restore credibility to the United States through effective use of soft power. The I-VAWA will also have a great impact on HIV/AIDS.

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic progresses, its consequences for women and girls become more extreme. Everywhere, women are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS; in sub-Saharan Africa women make up more than 60% of all people living with HIV and are at greater risk of acquiring HIV than are men. Among the many reasons for this is violence against women and girls. Violence or the fear of violence can prevent women from negotiating safe sex and from seeking health services or information, including HIV testing, care and treatment.

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Studies have shown that violence or the fear of violence can have concrete impacts on behaviors that increase vulnerability to HIV and the inaccessibility of HIV/AIDS care and treatment services. For example, women who have been forced to have sex have been found to be almost six times more likely to use condoms *inconsistently* than those who have never been coerced. Trauma and depression arising from violence can lead to other behaviors that increase HIV risk, such as alcohol and drug use, regardless of whether the violence was experienced as an adult or witnessed as a child. In addition, men who are violent toward their intimate partners have been shown to be more likely to have multiple sexual partners than men who are not violent; multiple concurrent sexual partnerships is one of the primary causes of the spread of HIV in a generalized epidemic such as exists in much of sub-Saharan Africa. These risks are largely true of physical and emotional violence much as they are for sexual violence; for this reason, we must address *all* forms of violence against women and girls as part of our global health and development goals and our fight against HIV/AIDS.¹

All forms of violence require a multisectoral response that addresses socio-cultural and gender norms, the legal environment, the integration of violence prevention and response into health services, and the provision of safe educational spaces for girls and for boys. As such, the U.S. Congress must swiftly pass the multisectoral International Violence against Women Act (I-VAWA) and ensure that it is fully funded, beginning in fiscal year 2011. Until now, U.S. government programs on international VAWG have been piecemeal at best, lacking in funding, coordination, and scope. It is urgent that we take action to rectify this fundamental gap in our foreign assistance programs by ensuring that there is policy and funding to support comprehensive, multisectoral programming that can reach from the local to the national levels and empower countries to address this challenge in a holistic and relevant manner.

¹ For more information about the links between VAWG and HIV/AIDS, see the report, *Zero Tolerance: Stop the Violence against Women and Children, Stop HIV/AIDS* (available on the Global AIDS Alliance website at http://aidsalliance.3cdn.net/cfbfc372c0ec68f29d_sgm6b8q7z.pdf).

PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief) offers an opportunity for scale-up of coordinated, integrated responses to VAWG that recognize the wide-ranging impact that violence has on the well-being of women, girls, their families and societies. The Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) has made important headway in linking VAWG programming with HIV/AIDS services, but there is still a long way to go. With Congressional oversight, the International Violence against Women Act will help ensure that OGAC takes its efforts to the next level, working across agencies and divisions to ensure a comprehensive response to VAWG that will only benefit the U.S. response to the global AIDS pandemic. In fact, without addressing VAWG, our multibillion-dollar fight against AIDS is sure to fail; yet, OGAC cannot do it all alone.

Similarly, the I-VAWA will catalyze and expand upon successful efforts to make schools safe for all children. The Safe Schools Program recently concluded by the USAID Office for Women in Development addressed school-related violence, a key barrier for many children who seek an education, but are unsafe—and therefore often unsuccessful—at school. As education is one of the most cost-effective HIV prevention interventions available to us, it is critical that we address not only educational access, but educational quality as well. Studies have shown that if every child received a primary education, 700,000 new cases of HIV could be prevented each year. But when children around the world are kept from going to school by concerned parents, choose to stay home, or are unable to focus due to violence or the fear of violence, we eliminate one of our best chances at an AIDS-free generation. The Safe Schools Program should be re-established and empowered to go to scale where it has piloted work, and to take its successful model to other countries engaging in U.S.-supported HIV/AIDS and VAWG programs. We know the strategies that work to address school-related violence. The Subcommittee is today taking a necessary first step in ensuring that the U.S. government's foreign assistance programs have the capacity, expertise, coordination and funding to put these strategies into action.

Finally, an important lesson learned from the global HIV/AIDS movement is that it is essential to provide for local ownership and the meaningful involvement of indigenous civil society organizations in the design and implementation of programs that will affect them and their communities. Again, the I-VAWA offers opportunities to take this lesson to the next level. The I-VAWA must include indigenous women's organizations and provide financial support for them to implement programs in their own communities, in order to capitalize on the expertise that only they can lend. This will increase the efficacy of U.S.-supported programs and ensure they are sustainable into the future. In fact, with an issue that pervades society in the way that VAWG—and HIV/AIDS—does, the only way to truly halt and reverse the damage done is by learning from those who live it every day.

One message bears repeating: unless we address global violence against women and girls, our multibillion-dollar fight against AIDS is sure to fail.

From one U.S. agency or bureau to the next, we have a multitude of successful strategies, projects and programs working to address VAWG. Yet, without good coordination, a multisectoral mandate, and sufficient funding for a robust, sustainable response, these strategies, projects and programs will remain isolated efforts with minimal impact. The U.S. Congress must now demonstrate its commitment by investing in programs such as PEPFAR and the Safe Schools Program that are already working, and by passing—and funding—the International Violence against Women Act. Today, Chairman Delahunt is taking the first important step.

Dr. Paul Zeitz
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Global AIDS Alliance