

AIDS Conference Release

Indigenous* Peoples' Satellite Planning for 16th International 2006 AIDS Conference

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TORONTO - 2 Spirited People of the 1st Nations and the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy are set to co-host the Indigenous Peoples' Satellite at the XVth International AIDS Conference in 2006. An international Indigenous planning committee with representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States met in Toronto this week to discuss the format for this historic gathering.

Ms. LaVerne Monette, Provincial Coordinator of the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, said the Indigenous Peoples' Satellite "will provide a forum for Indigenous people to discuss issues of vital importance for Indigenous communities around the world." The Satellite will be held one day prior to the opening ceremonies for the 2006 International AIDS Conference, which will give the participants an opportunity to network, liaise and scope out the various tracks of the conference.

As a result, the Indigenous representatives will be better informed of progress relative to care, treatment, prevention and support and will be posed to respond to the epidemic in a cohesive manner, specific to each of their own communities. Tragically, HIV infection rates have risen dramatically since the 1996 International AIDS Conference which was held in Canada. Aboriginal people in Canada are overrepresented in the HIV epidemic.

Before 1993, 1.2% of reported AIDS cases in Canada were among Aboriginal people. In 2003 this increased to 13.4% of reported AIDS cases among Aboriginal people. Infection rates are highest among Aboriginal women and youth. Clearly, things have gotten much worse for Aboriginal people on the HIV/AIDS front in the ten years since the 1996 International Conference. The 2006 International AIDS Conference is a critical turning point for Indigenous peoples in the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Mr. Art Zoccole, Executive Director of 2 Spirited People of the 1st Nations stated that "Indigenous HIV/AIDS issues have never received significant agenda time at the International AIDS Conferences. An Indigenous Satellite meeting will ensure that Indigenous issues receive attention and that Indigenous peoples from around the world can network and exchange important and relevant ideas with one another."

More than 1,500 Indigenous people are expected to attend the Toronto conference. This

Indigenous Satellite will enhance an Indigenous presence and ensure that their needs are reflected on the agenda.

Health Canada is a key funding partner for the Satellite and provided funding for the first Satellite which was held in Vancouver in 1996. The Indigenous Peoples' Satellite will be a significant event for Indigenous community based activists and researchers and people living with HIV/AIDS to strategize prior to the conference. This will be the largest International AIDS Conference to date, with approximately 30,000 of the world's most important scientists, physicians, health care workers and community leaders working on HIV/AIDS to share current knowledge on a full spectrum of issues about the global epidemic.

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*Indigenous Peoples" include: Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Maori, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders