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THREE GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH HIV, STUDENTS, YOUTH AND PARENTS ENLIST TO FIGHT AGAINST “WAR ON CONDOMS”

Demanding end to US government misinformation, immediate accuracy in public programs, and release of warehoused condoms in Uganda, they join forces for nationwide, public protest

New website includes key reports, new data on condom effectiveness: www.champnetwork.org/index.php?name=war-on-condoms

Community HIV/AIDS activists spanning three generations have joined together to fight what they have identified as a **war on condoms**, referring to systematic efforts of the Bush Administration and conservative allies to restrict accurate information and access to this key HIV prevention tool. They have launched a website with recently-released data on condom effectiveness and have pledged to take direct action to ensure access to HIV prevention tools.

Angered by Sen. Coburn’s (R, OK) demand for warning labels on condoms as well as the Bush Administration’s promotion of domestic and global abstinence-only-until-marriage policies that ban accurate discussion of condoms and discourage their use, they have vowed to escalate efforts to combat policies that have allowed HIV to spread.

CHAMP members and allies will sponsor public protest and non-violence civil disobedience actions in order to expose the complicity of the Federal government in fundamentalist attacks on effective HIV prevention.

Fundamentalist-driven claims of condom ineffectiveness would be laughable, if they were not becoming the stuff of public policy -- and this in a time of an escalating AIDS crisis, with transmission rates unabated and most new cases in youth and people of color,” said *Lei Chou, Director of Mobilization for the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP)*.

“Now they’ve latched on to HPV, a very common virus that condoms can prevent in the first place, and prevent its progression to cancer for those with the most dangerous strains, claiming that there should be warning labels on condoms that they are not foolproof in preventing HPV. Our website arms people with the truth on HPV to end the taxpayer-funded smear campaign.”

Joining together across the country, they are demanding:

- an end to US funding for misleading and inaccurate abstinence-only-until-marriage programs here and around the world
- cessation of pressure on PEPFAR (US funding for global AIDS efforts) recipients to limit condom access or education on their use
- education for all people, including youth, on how and why to use a condom and other methods of HIV prevention
- enhanced access to free male and female condoms
- condom labeling that remains accurate and affirmative
- more research on next-generation HIV prevention options, including vaccines and microbicides (non-toxic products to kill HIV)
- public dialogue, debate and press coverage on condoms and HIV prevention that is unbiased and medically accurate

The enlistees have joined the **Campaign to End AIDS** (www.CampaignToEndAIDS.org), a nationwide effort that asserts that current knowledge on HIV prevention and treatment could bring the epidemic under control, if done to scale. The Campaign is sponsoring ten caravans through every state this fall converging for five days of protest and events in Washington DC from October 8-12.

CHAMP members and allies are calling for non-violence civil disobedience actions during that time, in order to expose the complicity of the Federal government in fundamentalist attacks on effective HIV prevention.

“This was not a war of our choosing,” explained *Dr. Walt Senterfitt, CHAMP board chair and Los Angeles-based member of the Steering Committee of the Campaign to End AIDS*, “Condoms are cheap and effective lifesavers, and we’ve known that for years. But we’re seeing this Administration once again spread lies and rumors, stirring up public sentiment for things are not in our interest, and we’re ready to go to the front lines of this battle, armed with the truth. People of faith and of conscience have no choice but to rise up in the face of injustice that threatens our families and communities.”

Noting that this war is being waged in other countries as well as their own, the leaders point out the current, artificial condom shortage in Uganda, a nation with over a decade of success from their widespread promotion, and join a worldwide call for restoring access.

“How did it happen that the country with some of the most progressive and effective policies on HIV prevention does a switch-up and drags their feet while condoms are locked in a warehouse?” asked *Judith Dillard, Texas state coordinator for the Campaign to End AIDS and an out African-American woman living with HIV*. “Well, welcome to the world of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), where you play along, or they don’t pay. Uganda didn’t want to be another Brazil,” she concluded, referring to the recent loss of \$40 million in US assistance to Brazil, after they refused to condemn groups that help sex workers avoid HIV.