

The XVII International AIDS Conference



**A review of federal agency spending
on an international conference that is costing
taxpayers almost a half a million dollars —
dollars that could have helped prevent HIV/AIDS
and treat those living with the disease**

**United States Senate
110th Congress
Office of Senator Tom Coburn, M.D., Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information,
Federal Services and International Security
August 2008
www.coburn.senate.gov/ffm**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal agencies have come under scrutiny for their lavish spending on conferences and the HIV/AIDS conference, which has become especially popular on the federal employee “conference circuit,” is no exception. Whether it is the biennial international AIDS conferences or one of the countless domestic HIV/AIDS conferences, taxpayers have been spending millions every year to send federal employees to talk about a disease, when instead, using the same funds for prevention, treatment, or research would almost certainly have been a better use of taxpayer resources.

The upcoming XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, Mexico will be broadcast online, but that is not stopping Uncle Sam from spending almost a half a million dollars to send over 100 federal employees to the biennial event, which runs from August 3 through August 8.¹

According to news reports, conference organizers expect the event to cost \$25 million and to attract 22,000 delegates or conference goers.² Joining the tens of thousands of people from the HIV/AIDS industry, will be at least 116 federal employees from the National Institutes for Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC), the Department of Defense (DOD), the Census Bureau, and the Peace Corps. An additional 31 international employees from 31 countries, targeted for their HIV/AIDS cases, were permitted to attend, but as of press time, the State Department was not able to confirm how many, if any, of the 31 countries would send an employee, nor the cost to taxpayers of such travel.

The attending employees might see the “Sex Workers Mini Film Festival,” attend a workshop on the “Sexy Life” after HIV infection, or swing by a skills-building workshop entitled “Good Catholics Use Condoms” – all just some of the events scheduled for the AIDS conference.

About 700,000 infants are newly infected with HIV each year as a result of mother-to-child HIV transmission, mostly in developing countries. It costs about \$8 to prevent the transmission of HIV from an infected mother to a newborn with the administration of the drug Nevirapine—an antiretroviral drug that costs less than \$4 a dose and has proven to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child with the administration of just two doses.

¹ Based on answers from federal agencies in response to February 22, 2008 congressional inquiry from the office of Senator Tom Coburn, see text of letter to HHS: <http://theoinkreport.com/2008/02/27/senator-coburn-demand-common-sense-for-aids-conference/>; webcast information on www.AIDS2008.org, and live webcasts from the XVII International AIDS Conference on <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/aids2008/>. Estimated total cost of the U.S. delegation is \$458,565 for at least 114 employees.

² “Urging Universal Action to end AIDS, 22,000 Assemble in Mexico City for Start of the XVII International AIDS Conference,” August 3, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/admin/images/upload/756.pdf>; “58 journalists gather in Mexico City for AIDS conference,” *The Jamaica Observer*, July 30, 2008.

The funds to send the U.S. delegation to this single AIDS conference — at least \$473,095 — could have purchased enough Nevirapine to prevent 59,136 cases of baby AIDS.

Although both the U.S. House and the Senate have sought to address excessively large federal employee conference delegations, successfully passed amendments limiting employee travel are frequently dropped by House and Senate negotiators before the limits become law.

One provision that did make it into law affects foreign aid agencies by limiting attendance at an international conference to no more than “50 employees of agencies or departments of the United States Government who are stationed in the United States... .”³

For the 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, the provision appears to be having its intended effect on the agencies involved in international aid, as only 21 domestically-based employees will be travelling on behalf of USAID, the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, DOD, Census, and the Peace Corps.

Unfortunately, limiting provisions were dropped from the Health and Human Services funding bill and over 93 HHS employees will be jetting off to the Mexico City conference.

While certain sessions and workshops at the 2008 AIDS conference will be scientific and scholarly in nature, other sessions are less than academic, some promote the very behaviors that spread HIV— such as prostitution, and some seem intended to offend large groups of people working in the HIV/AIDS field — such as the “Good Catholics Use Condoms” session detailed below.

It seems little time is spent reflecting on what could be done on the ground to actually fight HIV or treat the thousands of Americans living with HIV and without access to treatment. Instead, taxpayer funds are spent on transcontinental flights, hotel accommodations, and large registration fees to attend conference after conference. Even conference participants acknowledge that their colleagues travel from conference to conference essentially talking to each other and fighting each other over the pot of federal funding.⁴

One press report from the last international AIDS conference held in Toronto was telling:

“T-shirts, condoms, grant proposals and 20,000 people. It must be the International Aids Conference in Toronto ... the biennial jamboree for what now constitutes an

³ Section 696 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008 (H.R. 2764), Public Law 110-161: “None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to send or otherwise pay for the attendance of more than 50 employees of agencies or departments of the United States Government who are stationed in the United States, at any single international conference occurring outside the United States, unless the Secretary of State determines that such attendance is in the national interest: Provided, That for purposes of this section the term ‘international conference’ shall mean a conference attended by representatives of the United States Government and representatives of foreign governments, international organizations, or nongovernmental organizations.”

⁴2004 op-ed by Laurie Garrett, *The New York Times*, as quoted in *Nature*, August 2006, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v442/n7103/full/442602a.html>; Stephen Lewis’ keynote address to Toronto AIDS Conference, August 18, 2006, http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/news_speech_item.cfm?news=1382, accessed October 2006.

‘Aids industry’ engaging everything from big pharma to ‘anthropologists for sex workers’ rights’ groups. Nearly every participant makes a living in this industry.”⁵

Time will tell whether similar characterizations will be used to describe the 2008 Mexico City AIDS conference.

⁵ “World spends too much in the fight against Aids,” *The Financial Times*, August 14, 2006, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/c2fb7574-2bbd-11db-a7e1-0000779e2340.html>.

FINDINGS

INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCES: ESSENTIAL OR NONESSENTIAL TRAVEL?

The 2008 International AIDS Conference, held from August 3 through 8, 2008, will not only be attended by thousands of people from the HIV/AIDS industry, but by at least 116 federal employees who will spend almost a half a million tax dollars to talk about HIV/AIDS.⁶

INTERNATIONALLY-FOCUSED FEDERAL AGENCIES SENDING 23 EMPLOYEES

The State Department and other agencies that receive foreign aid funding are limited by law to sending 50 U.S.-based employees to international conferences. The provision, and diligent oversight by those in charge of these agencies, appears to be having its intended effect.

In a sign of fiscal restraint, only two people from the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, the office that oversees the entire \$15 billion (and recently authorized \$48 billion) PEPFAR program will be attending the Mexico City-based International AIDS Conference. Just the ambassador Mark Dybul and a press person will be attending, at a total cost to taxpayers of \$7,342.⁷

USAID, which also falls under the 50-employee cap, is sending 12 employees, five DC-based and seven field-based for a total cost of \$68,030.⁸

The Peace Corps is sending two employees, for a total cost of \$8,198.⁹

The Department of Defense is sending three employees for an estimated cost of \$7,500.¹⁰

The U.S. Census Bureau is sending four employees for a total cost of \$10,500.¹¹

⁶ An additional 31 international employees from 31 countries targeted for their HIV/AIDS cases were permitted to attend, but as of press time, the State Department was not able to confirm how many, if any, of the 31 countries would send an employee, nor the cost to taxpayers of such travel. The estimated federal conference expenditure is \$473,095, though that number is likely to grow with the probable attendance of employees from some of the targeted countries.

⁷ E-mail from State Department Bureau of Legislative Affairs to the Office of Senator Tom Coburn, July 24, 2008; E-mail from OGAC to the Office of Senator Tom Coburn, July 24, 2008.

⁸ The USAID letter to Senator Coburn dated June 27, 2008 and signed by Jeffrey Grieco, Assistant Administrator Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, said the agency planned to sponsor 10 employees, five from the field and five from D.C. A subsequent e-mail communication from the State Department on August 4, 2008 (the day after the conference began), indicated USAID was actually sending seven employees, not five, from the field for an additional cost of \$14,530.

⁹ According to an e-mail from the Peace Corps, dated July 30, 2008, one employee is also using the trip to visit the Corps' Mexican post, which increased the travel cost for that attendee.

¹⁰ E-mail from State Department Bureau of Legislative Affairs to the Office of Senator Tom Coburn, August 4, 2008, noted DOD dollar figures were estimates and not final figures.

¹¹ Ibid.

In response to congressional inquiry, the Department of State said that it was possible that up to 31 foreign-based employees, selected by the Chief of Mission from 31 countries, might attend the conference in Mexico City.¹²

By the numbers: agencies attending the XVII International AIDS Conference



USAID

- \$18,200 for 5 DC-based employees (\$3,640 each)
- \$50,855 for 7 field-based employees (\$7,265 each)

Total of \$69,055 for 12 federal employees



OFFICE OF THE GLOBAL AIDS COORDINATOR

- \$7,342 for 2 DC-based employees (\$3,671 each)

Total of \$7,342 for 2 federal employees



PEACE CORPS

- \$8,198 for 2 employees (\$4,099 each)¹³

Total of \$8,198 for 2 federal employees



U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

- \$10,500 for 4 employees (\$2,500 each)

Total of \$10,500 for 4 federal employees

¹² Letter from State Department to Senator Coburn, dated April 9, 2008, signed by Jeffrey Bergner, Assistant Secretary Legislative Affairs, in response to February 26, 2008 congressional inquiry. As of press time, the State Department was not able to confirm how many, if any, of the 31 countries would send an employee, nor the cost to taxpayers of such travel.

¹³ Footnote 7, op. cit.



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

- Estimated \$7,500 for 3 employees (\$2,500 each)

Total (estimated) of \$7,500 for 3 federal employees¹⁴

In addition, the State Department and other agencies that receive foreign aid funding are spending \$10,000 toward a U.S. government-wide booth at the conference.¹⁵

HHS SENDS 78 EMPLOYEES AND WILL SPEND \$360,500 ON CONFERENCE, INSTEAD, COULD HAVE PREVENTED OVER 45,000 CASES OF INFANT HIV

Unlike the State Department and Foreign Operations budget, the Department of HHS is not constrained by law as to how many federal employees may attend international conferences. Congress has attempted to rein in HHS conference spending by law, but even when a conference-limiting amendment successfully passed the House of Representatives, it was ultimately dropped by House and Senate appropriators.¹⁶

If funds HHS spent to send 78 employees to the Mexico City conference to talk about HIV/AIDS, had instead been used to buy and administer Nevirapine (an antiretroviral drug that costs less than \$4 a dose and has proven to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child with the administration of just two doses), *45,062 infants around the world could have been spared from HIV infection.*

UNAIDS estimates that 1,800 children worldwide become infected with HIV each day, the vast majority of whom are newborns.¹⁷ UNAIDS also estimates that in 2005, just less than eight percent of pregnant women in low- and middle-income countries had access to services that could prevent the transmission of HIV to their babies.¹⁸

¹⁴ E-mail from State Department Bureau of Legislative Affairs to the Office of Senator Tom Coburn, August 4, 2008, noted DOD dollar figures were estimates and not final figures.

¹⁵ Letter from State Department to Senator Coburn, dated April 9, 2008, signed by Jeffrey Bergner, Assistant Secretary Legislative Affairs, in response to February 26, 2008 congressional inquiry.

¹⁶ Rep. Scott Garrett's (R-NJ) Amendment to H.R. 5006, FY2005 HHS Appropriations bill, adopted by the full House September 9, 2004; <http://www.house.gov/hensarling/rsc/doc/Garrett--50.pdf>. Amendment text was dropped in the final agency appropriations bill which became Public Law 108-447.

¹⁷ "2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic," UNAIDS, http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/2006GlobalReport/default.asp, accessed November 2006.

¹⁸ Ibid.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

- \$165,000 for hotel and per diem costs;
- \$100,000 for registration;
- \$86,000 for airfare from D.C., Atlanta, and overseas locations; &
- \$9,500 for a U.S. government-wide booth

Total of \$360,500 for 93 employees & a booth

Five separate agencies from HHS are sending employees to the Mexico AIDS Conference.



HHS AGENCY EMPLOYEES TRAVELING TO MEXICO

- National Institutes for Health: 56 employees¹⁹
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 32 employees²⁰
- Health Resources and Services Administration: 3 employees
- Food and Drug Administration: 1 employee
- Office of HIV/AIDS Policy in the Office of Public Health and Science: 1 employee

Total of 93 HHS employees²¹
(78 registered for the full conference)

¹⁹ HHS e-mail response, dated July 23, 2008, noted 50 NIH employees will attend, and an additional six employees will attend satellite sessions in México City, but are not attending the conference itself.

²⁰ Ibid., 23 CDC employees will attend, and six additional employees will attend satellite sessions in México City, but are not attending the International AIDS Conference itself. An additional three support staff from the CDC press office will manage an off-site media room to release the new domestic HIV/AIDS numbers.

²¹ HHS e-mail response, dated July 23, 2008, noted 78 federal HHS employees are attending the conference, plus an additional 15 HHS employees are travelling to Mexico City but not attending the full conference.

A LOOK BACK AT PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCES



Barcelona conference attendee protests U.S. treatment of people with AIDS

The first international AIDS conference during the Bush Administration was held in Barcelona in 2002, and was attended by 236 employees from just one federal agency (and an undetermined amount from other agencies) at an enormous cost to taxpayers of \$3.6 million. Tommy Thompson, the U.S. Secretary of HHS, was shouted down by protestors during his speech, which was thus inaudible.

The 2004 AIDS conference was held in Thailand and 130 federal employees (of which 20 were CDC employees) attended at an unknown cost.²² The CDC originally, and in what would have been a violation of the HHS Secretary's employee cap of 50 persons for the entire Department, planned to send 48 employees and complained to the press when its number of travelers (and thus the cost to taxpayers) was restricted.²³



2004 Thailand Conference's AIDS elephant



The last and most recent AIDS conference was held in Toronto in 2006 and 78 HHS employees attended for a cost of \$315,000.²⁴

The Toronto conference also included presentations from researchers who said countries must recognize prostitution as "legitimate legal work."²⁵ One convention center exhibit featured three prostitutes lying on a satin-covered

²² "Scientists rip US for cutbacks to global AIDS summit," *Nature Medicine*, July 2004.

²³ "U.S. cuts 28 CDC experts at forum," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 25, 2004.

²⁴ HHS letter to Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ) signed by William Steiger, Special Assistant for the Secretary of International Affairs, dated May 16, 2006.

²⁵ "Legalizing sex trade key to cutting HIV, activists tell AIDS conference," *The Canadian Press*, August 17, 2006.

bed, which was designed to “look like a typical workplace.”²⁶ One prostitute from Thailand was described as “standing amid pillows and sex toys in the [conference’s Stiletto] Lounge. To cheers from a crowd of around 200 people, she demanded health insurance, paid vacation and job security.”²⁷ The conference also featured a workshop on finding a woman’s erotic zone, one on how to apply condoms through “sex stunts,” and a display of explicit artwork, all of which were described as “hugely popular” at the 16th International AIDS Conference.²⁸

If the funds HHS spent on sending 78 employees to the Toronto conference, 140 employees to the Thailand conference, and 236 employees to the Barcelona conference to talk about HIV/AIDS, had instead been used to buy and administer 551,875 infants around the world could have been spared from HIV infection.



Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a transvestite from India, looks at a dress made of condoms by Brazilian artist Adriana Bertini, along with another condom dress by the same artist, on exhibit at the International AIDS conference in Toronto²⁹

FEDERAL AIDS PRIORITIES: TALK OR TREATMENT? CONFERENCES OR CARE?

An estimated 42 to 59 percent of the one million or more people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. are not receiving regular care. While a proportion of these individuals may not know their HIV status (up to one-third of those living with HIV/AIDS), others do not have adequate access to insurance coverage or care programs to help them afford the high cost of HIV treatment and services.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid.; “Sex workers march for rights at AIDS conference,” *Reuters Health*, August 16, 2006; “Sex workers are part of the solution” workshop, <http://www.aids2006.org/PAG/PSession.aspx?s=961>, accessed January 2007.

²⁷ Ibid., *Reuters*.

²⁸ “Sex sells AIDS prevention message at conference,” *Agence France Presse*, August 15, 2006; “Where is the Pleasure in Safer Sex?” workshop, <http://www.aids2006.org/PAG/PSession.aspx?s=815>, accessed January 2007.

²⁹ *Reuters* photo and caption, August 17, 2006, <http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/photospecials/graph/060818condomfs/>, accessed October 2006.

³⁰ “Financing HIV/AIDS Care: A Quilt With Many Holes,” Jennifer Kates, Kaiser Family Foundation HIV/AIDS Policy Issue Brief, May 2004, <http://www.kff.org/hiv/aids/upload/Financing-HIV-AIDS-Care-A-Quilt-with-Many-Holes.pdf>.



The U.S. will spend over \$450,000 to send 114 federal employees to the Mexico City AIDS Conference.



Both this child and his mom, who tested HIV positive, were treated with Nevirapine, which for as little as \$8 can prevent the transmission of HIV.

Consider that U.S. taxpayers will spend at least \$430,565 to send over 100 federal employees to a single AIDS conference.

While this is only a small fraction of the \$23.3 billion the U.S. federal government will spend on HIV/AIDS in 2008, it would be enough to provide life saving treatment to every American currently on the waiting list for medicine provided by the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP).³¹

Currently, there are 35 individuals on ADAP waiting lists in the U.S.³² The cost of AIDS drugs per patient per year is approximately \$10,000 to \$12,000, depending upon the regimen.³³ The total cost to treat those on AIDS drug assistance waiting lists, therefore, would be approximately \$420,000, which is nearly the amount being spent by the U.S. Government on travel, lodging and other expenses related to the International AIDS Conference.

While the waiting list for federal employees to attend the AIDS conference may now exceed the waiting list for patients seeking AIDS drugs, most taxpayers would probably agree that providing life saving treatment to 35 of their fellow Americans is a better expenditure of funds than paying to send 114 government employees on a trip to Mexico. No one will die from not being able to attend a conference, but the same is not true for those who are living with HIV/AIDS and can not access treatment.

³¹ "AIDS Funding for Federal Government Programs: FY1981-FY2009," Congressional Research Service, April 23, 2008; The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) provides medications for the treatment of HIV disease. Program funds may also be used to purchase health insurance for eligible clients and for services that enhance access to, adherence to, and monitoring of drug treatments. Federal ADAP grants are awarded to all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific jurisdictions. In Fiscal Year 2008 the federal ADAP appropriation is \$808.5 million. Total ADAP spending, however, is even higher, because state ADAPs also receive money from their respective states, from other Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program components, and through cost-saving strategies; photos from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/dec/10/aids.christmasappeal2005>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/aids2008/2730432130/in/set-72157606529879207/>.

³² "The ADAP Watch," National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors," July 10, 2008, http://www.nastad.org/Docs/Public/InFocus/2008711_NASTAD%20ADAP%20Watch%20-%207-10-08.pdf.

³³ "Financing HIV/AIDS Care: A Quilt With Many Holes," Jennifer Kates, Kaiser Family Foundation HIV/AIDS Policy Issue Brief, May 2004, <http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/Financing-HIV-AIDS-Care-A-Quilt-with-Many-Holes.pdf>.

WITH THE PROGRAM: SOME OF THE AIDS CONFERENCE SESSIONS COME WITH A POLITICAL AGENDA

WORKSHOP HOSTED BY PRO-PROSTITUTION GROUP WHOSE MEMBERS ARE “BRINGING IN LOTS OF TOURIST DOLLARS” FOR THAILAND

Prostitution is a known risk factor for spreading HIV. So what better group to host a 2008 AIDS conference workshop on the scourges of the deadly disease than a group that not only is pro-prostitution and “proud” of it, but one that brags on its website about bringing in “lots of tourist dollars”?

On Monday, August 4, a workshop entitled “Educational Tool 7 Hours 55 Minutes Sex Workers Empower Thailand” will be hosted by the Empower Foundation, a group that proclaims on the front-page of its webpage:

“We are sex workers. We are workers who use our brains and our skills to earn an income. **We are proud to support ourselves and our extended families. ... We are a major part of the Thai economy bringing in lots of tourist dollars. ...** We are sex workers; we are Empower...” (emphasis added).³⁴

Yet, well known internationally is that fact that part of Thailand’s sex tourism includes sexual exploitation through sex trafficking. According to the State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons Report 2008, “Thailand is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor.”³⁵ One group estimated that around 80,000 women and children were sold into Thailand’s sex industry in the 1990s, alone.³⁶

Both President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have condemned sex trafficking, with the Secretary stating, “Trafficking in human beings is nothing less than a modern form of slavery. And President Bush has called upon all countries to confront this evil. As the President has said, ‘human life is the gift of our Creator and it should never be for sale.’ The United States has a particular duty to fight this scourge because trafficking in persons is an affront to the principles of human dignity and liberty, upon which this nation was founded.”³⁷

In addition to exploiting women and children, Thailand’s approach to prostitution as a legitimate form of commerce has encouraged the practice and contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Dr. Wirat Klinbuayaem from San Kamphaeng Hospital in Chiang Mai,

³⁴ 2008 AIDS Conference website, session scheduled for Monday, August 4, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/Pag/PAG.aspx>; Empower Foundation website, <http://www.empowerfoundation.org/>, accessed July 2008; “A Delegates’ Guide to Law and Human Rights at AIDS 2008,” Open Society Institute (a George Soros funded entity), http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/hiv/aids/HR_delegates_guide.pdf.

³⁵ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/105659.pdf>

³⁶ Mahidol University’s Institute of Population and Social Research, “Trafficking of children on the rise,” *Bangkok Post*, July 22, 1998, as quoted by Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/thailand.htm>.

³⁷ Secretary Condoleezza Rice, June 3, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/47193.htm>.

Thailand, has warned that the rise of the sex trade is contributing to the growth of HIV. Dr. Klinbuayaem notes that there had been a rise in the number of new cases in the central and eastern regions of the country due to an increase in prostitution over the past 10 years. “With customers coming from across the country to use these prostitutes, AIDS was spreading at an alarming rate, he said, noting that few people realized that they were infected until it was too late, and in many cases, they had already passed on the virus to other people. At the same time, prostitutes were moving from town to town to offer their services, spreading the virus with them, he said.”³⁸

Clearly, addressing prostitution is an important topic for HIV prevention, but condoning or encouraging acceptance of the practice, as will be done at this conference, will not prevent HIV or protect the health of women or girls.

Also worth noting, Thailand’s “100% Condom Use” policy, which has often been hailed as an example of an HIV prevention success story, has not lived up to its hype under closer scrutiny.

In September 2005, the architect of Thailand’s HIV prevention program, Senator Mechai Viravaidya, conceded such failure, stating “I’m going to let the world know that Thailand is no longer a model for AIDS prevention.”³⁹

EVENT FEATURES PROSTITUTE FILM FESTIVAL (FILM CRITICIZES U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FOR BEING ANTI-PROSTITUTION)

On Tuesday, August 5, conferees can attend the “Sex Workers Mini Film Festival.” A description of the film festival (posted on a non-official conference website) notes that the festival will include a film where “sex workers voice their opinions regarding so-called ‘100% Condom Use Programs’ and describe the problems created by the ‘anti-prostitution pledge’ required to receive USAID and PEPFAR funds... .”⁴⁰

This “anti-prostitution pledge” refers to the U.S. law that says U.S. funds must not be used “to promote or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution or sex trafficking” and organizations must have a policy “explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking.”⁴¹

The Congressman who authored the prostitution provision said, “The issue that is before us today is whether or not we will provide money to organizations that seek the legalization of prostitution and also enable the [sex] traffickers ... to enslave these women.”⁴²

³⁸ “AIDS Concern Flagged As Prostitution Rises,” Thai Press Reports, October 15, 2003.

³⁹ “Mechai renews crusade against the Aids threat,” *The Nation*, September 5, 2005.

⁴⁰ “A Delegates’ Guide to Law and Human Rights at AIDS 2008,” Open Society Institute (a George Soros funded entity), http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/hivaids/HR.delegates_guide.pdf; PEPFAR stands for the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

⁴¹ “(e) LIMITATION- No funds made available to carry out this Act, or any amendment made by this Act, may be used to promote or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution or sex trafficking

“(f) LIMITATION- No funds made available to carry out this Act, or any amendment made by this Act, may be used to provide assistance to any group or organization that does not have a policy explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking,” U.S. Public Law 108-25, Title III, Subtitle A, Section 301, (e), (f).

Yet conference organizers and the hosts of the film festival will once again use the international platform of a global AIDS conference to criticize U.S. foreign policy, despite its pledge to help and treat the prostitutes while requiring funding partners to be explicitly against prostitution.

PRO-ABORTION GROUP THAT IS AGAINST CATHOLIC TEACHING TO HOST “CATHOLIC” SESSION AT GLOBAL HIV/AIDS CONFERENCE

In 2002, it was reported that the Catholic Church and its facilities run 26 percent of all AIDS treatment centers in the world and treat one-in-every-four AIDS patients.⁴³ Catholic Charities is among the largest faith-based grantees and partners in the PEPFAR billion dollar program.

Yet, the one session featured at the 2008 AIDS conference with the word “Catholic” in the title appears to be an in-your-face session against the Church’s teachings entitled, “Good Catholics Use Condoms: How to Answer the Tough Questions Surrounding HIV/AIDS Prevention and Religion.” The workshop on how to be a good Catholic will be moderated by a woman who is an advocate for a Washington, D.C.-based group that favors legalized abortion, gay marriage, and contraception for everyone — all positions opposed by the Catholic Church.⁴⁴

A description of the session on a non-official website says, “Participants will gain the skills necessary to counter anti-condom messaging... .”⁴⁵ It appears the Catholic Church’s efforts to teach 100 percent effective prevention skills, such as abstinence until marriage and to treat those with AIDS and to care for those AIDS orphans left behind, will not be included as part of any official program activity.

HEAVY FOCUS ON AN AIDS VACCINE ... WHICH DOES NOT EXIST

The conference agenda is filled with nine sessions on HIV vaccines, despite the fact that every major human trial of a vaccine to date has been cancelled mid-course, or before its start, and some have been found to actually *increase* the trial participants’ risk of becoming infected with HIV.⁴⁶

⁴² U.S. Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), author of prostitution/sex-trafficking provision, April 2, 2003.

⁴³ “AIDS Conference Excludes Vatican,” *ZENIT News Agency*, July 11, 2002, www.zenit.org.

⁴⁴ 2008 AIDS Conference website, session scheduled for Monday, August 4, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/Pag/PAG.aspx>. An e-mailed request for additional information on this session from the office of Senator Tom Coburn to event organizers went unanswered. Marissa Valeri “an advocate with Washington, D.C.-based Catholics for Choice” is the session “facilitator;” <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/news/inthenews/2008/FortyyearsatercontraceptionbancolorsUSVaticanties.asp> and http://www.aids2008.org/admin/images/upload/aids2008_programme_sunday_monday.pdf.

⁴⁵ 2008 AIDS Conference website, Sunday-Monday programme, http://www.aids2008.org/admin/images/upload/aids2008_programme_sunday_monday.pdf.

⁴⁶ “Plans for a large human trial of a promising government-developed H.I.V. vaccine in the United States were canceled [July 17, 2008] because a top federal official said scientists realized that they did not know enough about how H.I.V. vaccines and the immune system interact. The decision is a major setback in an effort to develop an H.I.V. vaccine that began 24 years ago when government health officials promised a

Most scientists involved in HIV/AIDS research believe that “a vaccine against HIV is further away than ever and some have admitted that effective immunization against the virus may never be possible,” according to a survey of more than 35 leading AIDS scientists in Britain and the United States conducted by *The Independent*.⁴⁷ “Nearly two thirds believed that an HIV vaccine will not be developed within the next 10 years and some of them said that it may take at least 20 more years of research before a vaccine can be used to protect people either from infection or the onset of AIDS.”

The sessions involving vaccines are as follows:

- New Minds, New Ideas: Attracting the Next Generation of Researchers and Technologies to HIV Vaccine Research
- Coordinating HIV Vaccine Research and Development Efforts to Contribute to the Goals of the HIV Vaccine Enterprise: Country-, Regional-, and Network-level Approaches
- Vaccines and Microbicides: Where do we go from here?
- HIV Vaccine Research: Cross-Cutting Issues
- Debate HIV/AIDS Research AIDS Health Care Foundation
- Preclinical Development of HIV Vaccines
- Preclinical Development and Animal Models for HIV Vaccines
- AIDS Vaccines - 2010 and Beyond: Charting a Course for the Future of AIDS Vaccine Research
- Understanding and Communicating Results from Recent AIDS Vaccine Efficacy Trials: Addressing the Present and Planning for the Future

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE: AN APPROACH TO INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL?

No international AIDS conference would be complete without sessions on the pleasurable aspect of living with a deadly, infectious disease.

To that end, attendees can attend the opening day’s event entitled, “Pleasure, Desire, and Safer Sex: Can they Come Together?”⁴⁸

Or, Wednesday’s session entitled, “Safer, Sensuous, Sexual Pleasure: Using Elements of Sensuousness in Promoting Safer Sex Among MSM.”⁴⁹ The description of this session on

marketed vaccine by 1987. ...The government vaccine — known as PAVE, for Partnership for AIDS Vaccine Evaluation — was similar to a much-heralded vaccine that failed last year. That vaccine was developed by Merck, and [NIH] helped pay for the Merck trials. ... Also, the findings among the 3,000 participants in nine countries in which the Merck vaccine was tested suggested it *might have increased the risk of becoming infected*” (emphasis added), “Trial for Vaccine Against H.I.V. Is Canceled,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/18/health/18vaccine.html>.

⁴⁷ “Is it time to give up the search for an Aids vaccine?,” *The Independent*, April 24, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/is-it-time-to-give-up-the-search-for-an-aids-vaccine-814737.html>.

⁴⁸ 2008 AIDS Conference website, session scheduled for Sunday, August 3, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/Pag/PAG.aspx>.

the web speaks for itself, “Currently SAATHII is carrying out an action research project to test the efficacy of using ‘elements of sensuousness’ in making male-to-male sex safer and mutually pleasurable. Workshop participants will be taught how some of those ‘elements of sensuousness’ can be used in their own area of work. The workshop will also try to explore newer and better ways and means of promoting safer and pleasurable sex among MSM. Special emphasis will be given on understanding how the subjective experiences of MSM, particularly male sex workers (MSWs), affect their morality, values and norms, and how it compares and contrasts with the normative approach towards their present sensuousness.”⁵⁰

In case these two sessions were not enough, attendees can drop by Thursday’s Global Village workshop “Sexy Life?!: After infection... .”⁵¹

It is not known whether or not federal employees will attend these sessions.

⁴⁹ 2008 AIDS Conference website, session scheduled for Wednesday, August 6, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/Pag/PAG.aspx>. MSM is the common abbreviation for the homosexual behavior of “men who have sex with men.”

⁵⁰ http://www.aids2008.org/admin/images/upload/aids2008_programme_wednesday.pdf.

⁵¹ 2008 AIDS Conference website, session scheduled for Thursday, August 7, 2008, <http://www.aids2008.org/Pag/PAG.aspx>. Additional information about the sessions other than their titles, was not available as of the release of this report.

CONCLUSION

An e-mail from conference organizers leading up to the event encouraged e-mail recipients to “make the most of your AIDS 2008 experience.”⁵² While such encouragement is obviously meant to market the conference, it is telling that an international conference, first started as a scholarly symposium, is now referred to as an AIDS “experience.”

The last conference, held in Toronto in 2006, was attended by 26,000 people. The event generated headlines around the world. It was also referred to as “boisterous political circuses” for the AIDS industry, and those in it that make a living off HIV/AIDS.⁵³

“make the most of your AIDS 2008 experience”

Reports indicated that the Bush Administration, which has funded the world’s largest donor program for HIV/AIDS, repeatedly came “under attack” at the Toronto conference for focusing on abstinence and monogamous relationships over condom distribution in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and also for refusing to fund needle-exchange programs for drug addicts or any activities “promoting prostitution.”⁵⁴ Despite the criticisms, the U.S. government is the largest purchaser of condoms in the world, and according to the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, the U.S. planned to distribute 477 million condoms in 2006, up from 320 million in 2001.⁵⁵

Political observers expect more criticism of the Bush Administration and U.S. foreign policy to come out of the Mexico City AIDS Conference, as well. Some of the sessions and workshops will undoubtedly be used as forums to criticize U.S. HIV/AIDS policy geared toward promoting abstinence-until-marriage and officially opposing prostitution.

⁵² E-mail from: AIDS 2008 Conference Secretariat (info@aid2008.org), Subject: AIDS 2008 June Update, Issue 8 - June 2008, Friday, June 06, 2008.

⁵³ “A Political Circus Is Part of the AIDS Meeting,” op-ed, *The New York Times*, July 20, 2004.

⁵⁴ “US AIDS chief denies morality comes before life,” *The Financial Times*, August 16, 2006;

“US-led war on drugs ‘inadvertently fuelling HIV epidemic’,” *Aidsmap.com*, August 16, 2006; The U.S. focus on these areas and the restrictions on funds were enacted into law by the United States Congress by overwhelming majorities in both the House and the Senate. The law does not prohibit the federal government or its grantees from providing health assistance to prostitutes, See text of key provisions: <http://www.house.gov/hensarling/rsc/doc/rights%20under%20HIV-AIDS%20law.pdf>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, U.S. AIDS chief; “US the world’s biggest provider of condoms for AIDS-hit nations: Powell,” *AFP*, July, 2004.

One participant in the Toronto conference, Stephen Lewis, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, said in his closing session keynote speech, "What has to happen, I think, is that we place a temporary moratorium on the endless, self-indulgent proliferation of meetings, seminars, roundtables, discussion groups, task forces ad nauseam, plus the production of reports, documents, monographs, statistical data ad repetition, and concentrate every energy at country level."⁵⁶

Yet, over the last two years, there is no evidence of a decline in the number of AIDS conferences held around the world and in the U.S. There are entire websites dedicated to international HIV/AIDS conferences, where they are held, and how to travel to them.⁵⁷ Mr. Lewis, who encouraged a meeting moratorium, helped plan the Mexico City conference as the co-chair of the conference's Leadership Programme Committee and a member of the conference's coordinating committee.⁵⁸

While recognizing that HIV/AIDS conferences will continue to be held, every agency should begin by ensuring that each conference attended by federal employees passes the following tests:

- Does the conference help further the Department's mission?
- Could the information provided at the conference be disseminated instead through a teleconference, the Internet or scholarly publication subsequent to the conference?
- Is the location appropriate and justified?
- Is the number of employees attending justified, and could one employee attend instead of many, and provide detailed briefings to other employees afterward?
- Is this a wise use of tax dollars when we have an over \$9.5 trillion national debt?
- Could the amount spent on the conference have been better spent on a higher priority, or not spent at all?

For AIDS conferences, agencies should also be required to ask, "Could these funds be better used to treat people with the disease, rather than to talk about them?" For example, the funds to send the U.S. delegation to this single AIDS conference — at least \$473,095 — could have purchased enough Nevirapine to prevent 59,136 cases of baby AIDS.

If federal employees were spending their own family's funds to attend these conferences, they would likely ask these questions and many more before, for example, spending \$1,000 to register for a conference.

Why should taxpayers' money be treated any differently?

⁵⁶ Stephen Lewis' keynote address to Toronto AIDS Conference, August 18, 2006, http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/news_speech_item.cfm?news=1382, accessed October 2006.

⁵⁷ "HIV/AIDS Conferences Worldwide, Upcoming events in HIV/AIDS, immunology and related fields," <http://www.conferencealerts.com/aids.htm>.

⁵⁸ <http://www.aids2008.org/search.aspx?qsearchString=Stephen%20Lewis>.