



HIV TESTING WEEK: WARNING AGAINST THE HIV/AIDS VIRUS

JOHANNESBURG, Wednesday 22 October – A call to arms rang out today as Johnny Clegg, world-renown South African musician, urged South Africans to choose life by getting tested during HIV Testing Week launching on the 3rd of November. Two organisations, Right to Care and Society for Family Health (SFH) through their social marketing franchise, New Start, are organizing an HIV Counselling and Testing week in the Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces. HIV Testing Week is supported by all five provincial government departments of health and is funded by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and a number of key corporate partners will participate in the campaign. This is the first time in South Africa that there has been such a significant collaborative effort between NGOs, provincial government departments and private companies across the country.

Scott Billy, SFH Technical Advisor, stated, "The HIV Testing Week proposal received tremendous support from government as a critical project that generates the necessary interest and awareness of the importance of getting tested. Testing is going to be offered across a wide variety of settings ranging from government sites and NGO funded sites to private sector sites. We are going to be engaging the national department of health further with the proposal that this becomes an annual event on a greater 'national' scale. It is only with concerted prevention efforts that we can turn the tide of this disease."

According to the 2005 Nelson Mandela HSRC Study of HIV and AIDS, HIV prevalence in the South African population is 10, 8%, with prevalence among adults aged 15 to 49 at 16,2%. These figures make it clear that it is essential that more people should get to know their HIV status and have access to the correct information and treatment. HIV testing week particularly calls on the men of South Africa, using the slogan "A Man Knows" to be courageous, to get tested, and to know their status. This is in line the

South African government's HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan, 2007 - 2011 objectives to increase the number of adults who have ever had an HIV test, with a focus on men.

"The men within our communities play a critical role in bringing a halt to the spread of this disease. According to research, South African men are well aware of HIV and AIDS and the main reason most of us are staying away from the testing centres is fear. Yes, getting tested can be a bit scary but a real man protects those he loves by testing regularly and always knowing his status. In this way a real man ensures the well-being of not just his own family but of his entire community," commented Clegg.

Miriam Mhazo, Senior Programme Manager for New Start said, "Only a quarter of South African men have ever received an HIV test. This is cause for great concern as it indicates that there are millions of men living with HIV and AIDS and spreading the virus simply because they are not aware that they have it. What we are saying to all South Africans with this campaign is that knowing your status is empowering. It allows you to plan for a bright future with or without the virus."

Several South African celebrities, among them legendary cricketer, Makhaya Ntini, swimming super-star Natalie Du Toit, and football hero Lucas Radebe, will be supporting the HIV Testing Week.

HIV Testing stations will be open daily from the 3 to 8 November. For the testing site closest to you, SMS HIV and your post code to 31771, or call 0800 212 686 for more information.

Ends.

About Right to Care

Right to Care (RTC) is a non-profit (Section 21) organisation that was established by two South African doctors in 2001. RTC is chiefly funded by PEPFAR through USAID and its aim is to build public and private sector capacity for the provision of safe, effective and affordable antiretroviral therapy.

Right to Care has a multi-pronged approach to the HIV pandemic, among which are:

- Supporting the government's HIV and AIDS programme through human resources, training, data management, and infrastructure
- Forming partnerships with the private sector and other NGOs to ensure the delivery of safe, effective, and affordable antiretroviral therapy
- Facilitating access to voluntary counselling and testing services

Right to Care is led by a management board consisting of Dr Ian Sanne (Managing Director), Dr Ali Bacher (Chairman)

About New Start

New Start is South Africa's largest HIV counselling and testing social marketing programme. It is a network that brings SFH and other local NGOs together to provide high quality HIV counselling and testing (CT). New Start is funded by the Global Fund via the South African National AIDS Committee and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

About PEPFAR

In 2003, President Bush launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to combat global HIV/AIDS – the largest commitment by any nation to combat a single disease in human history. In 2008, President Bush signed into law H.R. 5501, the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act. This legislation responds to the President's call last year to expand our commitment to this successful programme for five additional years. PEPFAR South Africa is a multi-agency initiative to provide support to the South African government and other organizations in the response to HIV and AIDS. Participating U.S. agencies include CDC, US Department of Defense, Department of State, Peace Corps, and USAID.

End.

