

--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE--

Harper government targeted at International AIDS Conference

Activists angered over funding cuts and regressive government policy protest the Canada exhibit booth

#endAIDS

Monday July 23, 12 – To launch off the AIDS 2012 XIX International AIDS Conference Washington D.C., Canadian and international activists demonstrated at the Canadian exhibition booth this afternoon. The Canadian booth is financed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and is a symbol of the government's presence at the conference. *"The Harper government's lack of commitment on HIV and human rights is negligent and shameful"*, said Alex McClelland of Canada's AIDS ACTION NOW, the group who organized the demonstration. *"We need to act in order to save our lives and our communities"*, stated McClelland who is living with HIV.

Around 50 activists targeted the booth carrying signs and banners stating messages such as "Harm reduction = Life", while chanting: "Harper's cuts are killing us, AIDS Action Now!" The booth was wrapped in caution tape reading: "The Harper Government: Evidence Free Zone", calling attention to the government's denial of the science and evidence of harm reduction interventions - such as providing needle exchange programs; and the implementation of failed approaches such as mandatory minimum sentencing. Protesters followed the conference rules of demonstration; activism at International AIDS Conferences is a recognized part of the community-based response to HIV.

Activists in Washington for the AIDS 2012 conference demonstrated to show their anger towards the Harper government's regressive approach to the country's growing HIV and Hepatitis C epidemics. *"Harper's agenda to dismantle our country's health and social safety net, and their implementation of moralistic and criminalizing policies on drug use are creating a perfect storm for HIV and Hep C infections to explode"*, stated Zoe Dodd, a harm reduction activist and member of AIDS ACTION NOW! *"We have to stand up against this denial of our basic human rights to health and security"*, said Dodd.

Since obtaining a majority of seats in the House of Commons, despite receiving only 39 percent of the vote, Harper's government has implemented massive cuts to social services, including to:

- Indigenous peoples health through cuts to funding of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch;
- Refugees and newcomers to Canada through decreasing services through the Interim Federal Health Program;
- People living with and most affected by HIV through cutting funding to national and local HIV service organizations.

During the XIX International AIDS Conference, AIDS ACTION NOW! mobilizing Canadian delegates at the AIDS conference and is part of an coalition of international organizations who will participate in the ***We Can End AIDS Massive Mobilization for Economic Justice and Human Rights***. On July 24th at NOON, the march will take over five main streets of DC, including K Street, New York Avenue, and Pennsylvania Avenue and culminate at the White House Gates.

-30-

FOR CANADIAN CONTACTS & INFO:

Alex McClelland, AIDS ACTION NOW: +1 438 938 2756, [mcclelland.alex@gmail](mailto:mcclelland.alex@gmail.com)

AIDS ACTION NOW!

www.aidsactionnow.org

@AIDSActionNow

We Can End AIDS Massive Mobilization for Economic Justice and Human Rights

www.wecanendaids.org

@WeCanEndAIDS