

--PRESS RELEASE--

## Activists Demonstrate Canadian Minister of Health's Address at International AIDS Conference

**July 25, 2012** – Demonstrators turned their back on Leona Aglukka, the Canadian Minister of Health during her opening remarks at the North American Regional Session at the AIDS 2012 XIX International AIDS Conference this afternoon. Activists from AIDS ACTION NOW! and Insite Vancouver addressed the Minister during her speech regarding her record of denying the science and evidence of harm reduction, as well as cuts to HIV programs across the country. The Minister – whose inaction and complacency on harm reduction, as well as recently implementing cuts to health and social services in Canada - have earned her vocal criticism from health professionals during the conference.

*“The Minister is actively denying the health and human rights of countless residents of Canada who are most impacted by AIDS and Hepatitis C”* said Alex McClelland, the spokesperson of AIDS ACTION NOW! who led the call for activists and conference delegates to turn their backs on the Minister. *“It is shameful that she would present at a conference on HIV, while actively denying proven prevention methods and implementing massive cuts to HIV prevention, care and support programs”*, stated McClelland just before the demonstration, *“the Harper Government has turned its back on our communities so we did the same to her”*.

Approximately 50 protestors held signs that read: “We can end AIDS when the Canadian Government recognizes the science and evidence of harm reduction” and “ We can end AIDS when the Canadian Government fully funds healthcare for all”. A large banner reading “Harm Reduction = Life” was unfurled by activists. Protesters followed the conference rules of demonstration; activism at International AIDS Conferences is a recognized part of the community-based response to HIV.

Dr. Philip Berger was among the protestors and held a sign in support of refugees living with HIV - addressing the impact of the Harper Government's cuts to refugee health in the Interim Federal Health Program. Dr. Berger had tried to question to Minister about cuts to refugee healthcare coverage at the conference yesterday, but was pushed away by her security team.

At the end of the Minister's speech, Clare Hacksel a spokesperson for PHS Community Health Service Society, the non-profit that operates Insite, publicly questioned the Minister regarding her denial of the proven successes of the supervised injection site. Hacksel, who spoke with supporters in advance of the session said: *“Minister Aglukkaq continues to ignore science at the expense of drug users lives”*.

The Minister acknowledged during her speech that people who inject drugs are disproportionately represented among rates people with HIV, but despite this, she continues to deny harm reduction approaches and refused to take a document from Hacksel evidencing the proven successes of Insite on reducing overdose deaths and rates of HIV and Hepatitis C.

Throughout the conference week in Washington D.C., the Harper Government has received numerous vocal criticisms regarding regressive policy stances and funding cuts from a wide range of healthcare professionals, activists and people living with HIV.

-30-

**For more information contact:**

Alex McClelland  
mcclelland.alex@gmail.com  
1 438 938 2756

**For information on Insite:**

Clare Hacksel  
[chacksel@phs.ca](mailto:chacksel@phs.ca)  
1 604 618 4074

[www.aidsactionnow.org](http://www.aidsactionnow.org)

@AIDSActionNow

**Video of the demonstration:** <http://youtu.be/oFkxwQXGvFE>

**Video of Dr. Berger and Mark Tyndall addressing the Minister on cuts to refugee healthcare:**  
<http://youtu.be/ft4tXzJkIMY>