



## Statement of Senator Feinstein on World AIDS Day

*- Calls on Congress to adequately fund research and treatment of HIV/AIDS -*

November 30, 2005

**Washington, DC** – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) issued the following statement today commemorating World AIDS Day. She plans to submit the statement to the Congressional Record when the Senate reconvenes in December:

“Mr. President, I rise today, on World AIDS Day, to remember the 20 million people who have died as a result of the largest pandemic in human history, and with the hope that the 40 million people worldwide who are currently living in the shadow of this devastating illness will not be added to the list of lives lost.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a certain and silent killer, decimating entire generations, crippling continents, and orphaning as many children as the populations of Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City combined.

While scientific advances promise new hope for so many, we are still far from winning the war on this deadly virus—much more must be done.

AIDS was first identified in the United States in Los Angeles in 1981.

In that year, as mayor of San Francisco, I allocated \$180,000 for the treatment of this disease. By the time I left the mayor’s office in 1988, funds allocated for AIDS programs in San Francisco had grown to over \$20 million, more than that of the federal government. At that time, the crisis had exploded. AIDS cases reported in the United States had ballooned exponentially from 189 in 1981 to a staggering 32,311.

Today, there are over 1 million Americans living with HIV, and the damage this disease continues to inflict across the globe is shocking.

Worldwide, some 40 million people are living with HIV; 95% of those 40 million reside in developing nations. Tragically, only 12% of those infected are able to access the anti-retroviral drugs needed to significantly extend and improve the quality of their lives.

It costs an estimated \$300 per person per year to purchase the drugs to treat someone with HIV in the developing world, which is less than one dollar per day. As Americans, it is

imperative that we acknowledge the AIDS crisis and its causes both globally and locally—but our current efforts are simply not enough.

Sub Saharan Africa, for example, accounts for only 10% of the global population but is home to 60-70% of the world's reported cases of HIV. Those infected in the region comprise some 25 million of the 40 million people worldwide stricken with the disease.

In Botswana, a staggering 39% of the entire population is HIV positive and the average life expectancy for a baby born in 2010 will be 27 years—a figure not seen since the end of the 19th century.

Although some countries have been remarkably proactive in preventing the spread of the virus, HIV remains rampant in others. In most countries, women are disproportionately affected by HIV, in some African nations outnumbering men by more than a three to one margin.

Sadly, our plight in America continues as well. New advances in antiretroviral drugs show promise in helping many, but AIDS remains an incurable, fatal disease. Especially disconcerting in this country are the disproportionate numbers of minorities and gay men contracting HIV.

African American women comprise some 72% of all women diagnosed with HIV in the United States. While African Americans make up only 12% of the American population, they account for about 40% of AIDS cases diagnosed since the pandemic began.

Perhaps most disturbing, a recent study revealed that 46% of black gay men tested were HIV positive, and of those tested, two-thirds were unaware of their status.

In my home state of California, 45% of Los Angeles nursing homes reported that they would not provide treatment for an HIV positive patient, and one-third of the city's OBGYNs would refuse to treat a mother with HIV.

As a Senator representing the state with the second-highest cumulative number of persons living with AIDS in the United States, I have taken a proactive approach to securing funding for those who so desperately need help battling this disease by consistently supporting increased funding and reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act.

I have been a co-sponsor of the Early Treatment for HIV Act since the 107th Congress, legislation that would ensure low-income HIV patients receive access to antiretroviral drugs from Medicaid before their immune systems are crippled by the disease.

Additionally, I have been a co-sponsor of the Microbicide Development Act since the 107th Congress, a bill to expand, intensify, and coordinate research and development of microbicides to prevent the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Today's prevention options such as condoms and mutual monogamy are not feasible for millions of people around the world, especially women. Many women lack the social or economic power to insist their partners use condoms. Microbicides are user-controlled products in the form of

gels, creams, or films that kill or inactivate the bacteria and viruses that cause HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and their use empowers women to protect themselves from contracting this disease.

To combat AIDS in the developing world, I co-sponsored the Kennedy-Feinstein-Feingold Amendment to Help Fight HIV/AIDS, urging developing countries to use compulsory licensing to greatly increase the amount of safe, generic drugs made available to HIV/AIDS patients.

I also authored an amendment to strike language requiring that one-third of funding from the President's Global HIV/AIDS initiative go to "abstinence until marriage" programs to ensure that our prevention dollars use the comprehensive "ABC" approach (Abstinence, Be Faithful, use Condoms) to prevent the spread of HIV.

In the 24 years since AIDS was first diagnosed, America and the world have made tremendous strides in battling HIV. The average life expectancy of someone infected with HIV has risen dramatically since the disease was first identified. Despite our best efforts, the war on AIDS is still not won. Even the most optimistic estimates predict a vaccine may be another ten years away. As Americans, we must do everything in our power to expedite the defeat of this disease.

I urge my fellow senators and the Bush Administration to do everything in their power to find a cure for the AIDS pandemic and adequately fund research and treatment of HIV/AIDS. While our efforts have been great, the toll AIDS has taken on the world has been far greater.

It is my hope that our unwavering dedication to helping the countless victims of HIV/AIDS will continue well beyond World AIDS Day. It should be our goal to band together to work to find the cure for this deadly illness which transcends gender, race, and nationality.

On this day, I encourage people around the world to take time to ponder the vast scope of the AIDS pandemic, and remember those we have lost. But let us not remember them in sorrow, but rather let their memory inspire our efforts to prevent any further devastation from this virus. Amidst our many domestic and international problems, let us remember that AIDS has cruelly cut short tens of millions of lives, more than that of any warlord, dictator, or natural disaster in human history. This disease has ravaged a continent, orphaned innumerable children, and torn apart entire communities. Millions more will die of AIDS this year, and millions more, including newborn infants, will become infected. Until the day when this virus no longer threatens the lives of millions of innocent people, we all must pledge to keep this fight alive.

It is our responsibility as representatives of the people to take action now to eradicate this deadly disease. Each day we wait is another day when someone's loved one will fall victim to this virus. Silence is approval, and it is our duty to raise our voices for those whose voices have been silenced. It is our duty to further the strides taken since the first case was diagnosed in 1981, so our generation can celebrate the day when the last case is cured. As I have said before, "I was there in the beginning, and I plan to be there in the end."

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