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AIDS Response at CODE RED

Thousands of Activists March to International AIDS Conference in Durban

“We’re Not Even Halfway to the End of AIDS, Treatment For All Now!”

18 July 2016, Durban, South Africa: Today, over 8,000 activists from South Africa and across the globe took to Durban’s streets for the 21st International AIDS Conference—highlighting a massive disconnect between political promises to end AIDS and the realities on the ground of insufficient funding and health systems stretched to the breaking point.

Activists presented their demands to key political decision makers in the fight against AIDS, including South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, U.S. Ambassador Patrick Gaspard and Global AIDS Ambassador Deborah Birx and others.

Just weeks ago, world leaders gathered at the United Nations and promised to “end AIDS” by 2030, yet 20 million of the 37 million people with HIV do not have access to treatment, over one million people die every year of the treatable and preventable disease and, for the first time, HIV funding from rich countries fell substantially in 2015.

In 2000, activists stormed the International AIDS Conference in Durban and forced a revolution in the response to HIV at a time when the consensus was AIDS treatment for Africa was not feasible. Returning to Durban 16 years later, activists applauded the dramatic advances in HIV science but pledged to overturn a new consensus barring access to that science for so many—pessimism about funding and magical thinking about “ending” AIDS with business as usual.

Anele Yawa, General-Secretary of the Treatment Action Campaign, said:

Today in South Africa, 440 people will die of AIDS. 440 more will die tomorrow and the next day. 18 people every hour. Our political leaders want to talk about the millions who are on treatment—which is a far cry from the last Durban AIDS conference. But we know that instead we have to tell the truth about the majority who still lack access... about insufficient funding, about the high price of medicines. We have to talk about corrupt officials in the health system [like Free State MEC for Health Benny Malakoane] and why governments would rather let people die than clean up their political houses. The time for this evasion ends now—AIDS is a crisis, a political crisis, and the same old rhetoric must end.

Asia Russell, Executive Director of the Health Global Access Project, said:

“At a moment with HIV treatment science has shown us the way forward, our governments are engaged in a cynical game of promising to end the AIDS crisis and then refusing to put up the funds to do so. With \$7 billion more a year we could be

moving toward ensuring all people living with HIV have access to treatment, but instead they are trying to convince us we should choose—which people, which geography, which age or gender or sexuality—because there is not enough money. We reject these false dichotomies, the wealthiest countries in the world could fill this gap in a heartbeat—we are here to demand that they find the courage and common sense to do so.”

Mark Heywood, Executive Director of Section 27

The International AIDS conference takes place at a time when the global AIDS response is floating around in a sea of highfalutin rhetoric. The challenge we face is to overthrow this rhetoric and turn it into a concrete, plain English (or plain any language) agenda about what precisely needs to be done to curtail HIV in the next phase of the global response.

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