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MICROBICIDE RESEARCH AT USAID RECEIVES \$30 MILLION IN HOUSE FOREIGN OPERATIONS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Leading Microbicide Organizations Applaud Efforts of Rep. Kolbe and Call on Arizona Congressman to Introduce Key Microbicide Legislation

Washington, DC (July 13, 2004) The Alliance for Microbicide Development, the Global Campaign for Microbicides and the International Partnership for Microbicides are pleased to announce today that the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations has provided \$30 million for microbicide research at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) – an \$8 million increase over funding from last year. The foreign aid spending bill was reported out of committee last Friday and is now before the full House for consideration.

“No one can ignore the ruinous impact that the AIDS epidemic is having on families, economies and whole societies around the world. Alarming, the face of AIDS has become increasingly female as women now account for over half of the individuals infected with AIDS globally, and 60 percent of those in Africa,” said Polly Harrison, Director of the Alliance for Microbicide Development. “Microbicides would give women everywhere power over AIDS in a way like never before by allowing them to protect themselves from the epidemic, even in societies where they lack the economic or societal standing to control their sexual encounters.”

“Complemented by additional prevention strategies, a safe and effective vaccine is still the world’s best long-term hope of controlling AIDS. We need to employ a combination of technologies that have the potential to prevent transmission, broaden our response, and tighten our collective grip on the AIDS pandemic. Microbicides are an integral part of that approach,” added Harrison.

Recently named one of the "10 most promising biotechnologies for improving global health," microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women and their partners could apply topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections. Over 60 candidate microbicides are in the pipeline and 18 are already in clinical testing, with 6 of those entering late-stage testing this year. Many researchers believe that, with an increase in funding and cooperation, a microbicide could be available to women in developing nations within five years. Even a partially-effective microbicide could stop 2.5 million infections over three years.

“We applaud Representative Kolbe for recognizing the great promise of microbicides and for his leadership in appropriating \$30 million for microbicide research at USAID,” added Harrison. “But microbicide funding is still woefully inadequate and greater leadership is needed. Rep. Kolbe should further his commitment by introducing the Microbicide Development Act in the House and giving a substantial and necessary boost to the future of microbicide research.”

The Microbicide Development Act would establish a Microbicide Research and Development Branch at the National Institutes of Health and strengthen microbicide activity at USAID and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). At present, microbicide research at NIH – the organization spending the lion’s share of federal dollars in this area – is conducted under several institutes with no single line of administrative accountability, no specific funding coordination, and varying levels of interest and commitment across institute leadership. Responsibility for this important technology resides in a handful of mid-level program staff and, despite the undeniable commitment of those researchers who do work on microbicides, few NIH researchers can claim microbicides as a sole charge. The Microbicide Development Act would remedy that.

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