



**Global Campaign
FOR Microbicides**

The Global Campaign News June 30, 2003

Welcome to the biweekly *Global Campaign News*! The *Global Campaign News* is a forum for international exchange on microbicide activities and information with an aim to build a more informed and integrated movement for microbicide development and other prevention options against HIV and STDs.

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Microbicides and the Global AIDS Act

At the end of May, the US Senate passed the "United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003" (HR 1298). This five-year, US \$15 billion initiative, commonly known as the Global AIDS Act, was signed into law by President Bush on May 27, 2003 and constitutes the largest single monetary commitment the United States has ever made to deal with the AIDS pandemic in Africa.

The Democrats offered several amendments to improve the bill, but Republicans were united in wanting to pass the House version without changes. The only amendment passed was one sponsored by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) to increase funding for debt relief.

Microbicide advocates had been working with Senator Corzine's office (D-NJ) on an amendment that would have strengthened the microbicides language in the bill. Because all amendments to the bill (but one) were being defeated regardless of merit, we ended up using a different tactic. Senator Corzine engaged Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist in a floor "colloquy" on the issue of microbicide research and development, and specifically on the need for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to establish a branch dedicated to microbicide research and development within the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases -- thus creating a single line of administrative accountability and funding coordination.

A colloquy is a "pre-agreed to" floor dialogue between two members of the Senate that helps to establish Congressional intent. With Senator Frist's approval, Senator Corzine gave a thorough and substantive statement, outlining the need for microbicide research, reviewing the pipeline of potential products awaiting trial, and calling attention to his bill -- the Microbicide Development Act (MDA). He then asked for and received, Majority Leader Frist's support for greater funding. Senator Frist also joined Senator Corzine in urging NIH to consider establishing a "microbicides branch" and urged the leadership at NIH to give this proposal prompt and careful consideration.

Given the legislative realities, obtaining this floor statement from the Senate Majority Leader constitutes a substantial victory for our community. Up until now, Senator Frist has neither spoken out on the issue of microbicide development nor supported the community's efforts to address deficiencies at NIH.

The results of this colloquy have since been brought to the attention of NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni. In a recent letter, Senator Corzine and the other co-sponsors of the Microbicides Development Act relayed the colloquy recommendations and specifically asked Dr. Zerhouni to comment on the proposal to establish a Microbicide Development Branch at NIAID.

We are all eagerly awaiting Dr. Zerhouni's response and will relay news of subsequent developments as it becomes available. Meanwhile, hats off to Senator Corzine and his staffer Sandra Caron for employing the colloquy mechanism so successfully and for using it to urge NIH action on its recommendations. Hats off also to Pam Norick, our legislative consultant, and the many microbicide advocates all across the country whose ongoing contact with their legislators has raised Congressional awareness to a level where real progress is happening.

Visit our [legislative page](#) on our website where you will find the transcript of the 5/16/03 Senate floor colloquy as well as the materials you need to write to your Senators and urge their support for the Microbicide Development Act (S. 859). A companion bill will be introduced in the House of Representatives soon.

A Call to Action on Eve of Bush's Trip to Africa

President Bush is scheduled to visit Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa next month from July 7 to July 15. On the eve of his visit, we need to urge President Bush to look closely at the sky-rocketing rates of HIV infection among African women and to support microbicides -- products that will put the power of HIV prevention directly in women's hands. Call the White House at (202) 456-1111 between 9am-5pm today, Tues or Wed, June 30 – July 2. Or email the President directly at president@whitehouse.gov. Please urge the President to increase US investment in the development of safe and effective topical microbicides for HIV prevention. For more information, e-mail ifua@path-dc.org.

Promoters of unproved products continue to offer false hope

At a conference in San Jose, California last April, Rev. Ted McIlvenna (a retired United Methodist minister and director of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality) announced that his organization had worked for over a decade to develop a microbicide called N-15. While proclaiming its effectiveness, McIlvenna added that the Institute had not sought public funding to test the compound and had no plans to seek FDA evaluation of it as a microbicide.

Could this be an unrecognized break-through? Unlikely. N-15 is a derivative of Nonoxynol (the base compound from which N-9 is derived). McIlvenna has been promoting "EroGel", a personal lubricant containing N-15 as its active ingredient, for the last six years and the product is widely available in sex shops and on the internet. Although McIlvenna cannot market EroGel as a microbicide, he continues to tout its microbicidal benefits explicitly and enthusiastically in print and at conferences. "If everyone had EroGel," McIlvenna argues, "condom sales would plummet [and] the lucrative AIDS-drug market would have no reason to exist after a while because no one would test positive for HIV."

In a less grandiose but similarly dubious manner, a product called "Pure Irish Moss vaginal lubricant" is being promoted in Canada as a potential microbicide. On its label, the manufacturer states that "Because I have no licensed factory for making a drug, I have to sell it as a cosmetic with no health claims.

However, recent medical trials show that carageenen coats the mucous membranes and helps protect against herpes, HIV papilloma virus, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. Like condoms, it is not 100% effective and so should be used together with condoms.”

Both EroGel and Irish Moss are being sold as lubricants -- but with implied or explicit messages to the consumer that they provide some level of microbicidal protection. It is always possible that one of the above products, or one of a host of other OTC lubricants, will be proven someday to work as effective microbicides. But no data have yet been presented substantiating the microbicidal effectiveness of either EroGel (N-15) or Irish Moss lubricant.

When the Canadian AIDS Society (sponsor of the Microbicides Advocacy Network Group, our Canadian affiliate) became aware of the claims being made in connection with the sale of Irish Moss lubricant, they immediately reported it to Health Canada. It is part of our job as advocates to confront and report misleading or fraudulent claims related to microbicides so that consumers are not misled or encouraged to make unproven assumptions about existing products.

Other Upcoming Events:

Microbicides 2004: For more information on the program, abstract submission, registration and sponsorship opportunities, please go to www.microbicides2004.org.

Global Campaign Steering Committee Meeting

Washington, D.C. – July 8-9

Community Involvement in Clinical Trials Meeting

Johannesburg, South Africa -- July 28-30th

South Africa AIDS Conference

Johannesburg, South Africa -- August 4-6

CDC National HIV Prevention Conference

Atlanta, Georgia -- July 27- 30th

FDA Expert Group Meeting on Clinical Design for Microbicides Trials

Bethesda, Maryland – August 20th

ICASA – 13th International Conference on AIDS and STDS in Africa

Nairobi, Kenya - September 21st-26th. www.icasanairobi2003.org/

India Stakeholders Meeting on Microbicides

New Delhi, India – September 29th-30th

Consultation on Ethics in Clinical Trials

Washington D.C. – October 23 – 24th

4th International Conference on AIDS in India

Chennai, India -- November 9-12th

International Advocates Meeting on Microbicides

London, UK – November 14-16th

Italicized meetings are being organized directly by the Global Campaign

We welcome your input and contributions. Correspondence can be addressed to info@global-campaign.org. If you would like to unsubscribe to the Global Campaign News, please reply to this e-mail with the subject line: UNSUBSCRIBE.