



Global Campaign News – Issue #31 March 1, 2004

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.

In this issue:

1. Microbicides included in Bush’s PEPFAR.....	1
2. UNAIDS Launches New Global Coalition on Women and AIDS	2
3. Conference speaker expresses cautious optimism on microbicide development.....	3
4. Invitation to GCM’s pre-conference to Microbicides 2004	3
5. Creative Collaborations for Microbicide Awareness.....	4
6. Female Condom Launched in India.....	4
7. US advocates creating a Microbicides presence at the March for Women’s Lives.....	5
8. New North America coordinator at Global Campaign	5

1. Microbicides included in Bush’s PEPFAR

After years of work to increase federal recognition of the importance of microbicides research, US advocates were pleased to see “Microbicide Development” as a topic heading in the new President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The report, submitted to Congress on February 23, details how the five-year, \$15 billion global AIDS initiative proposed by President Bush in January 2003 will be implemented and releases the first \$350 million in grants. The five-year budget includes \$9 billion in new funding over the next five years to AIDS programs in 14 countries in Africa and the Caribbean, \$5 billion through "existing agreements" (i.e. old money) with countries and \$1 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The Plan has been criticized in the HIV/AIDS services and advocacy community because of its very minimal contribution to the multilateral Global Fund, the 13-month time lag between announcement of the initiative and “writing the check”, the smallness of the initial check (\$350 million out of a budget of \$15 billion) and the continuing, disproportionate emphasis on “abstinence only” HIV prevention messages. It is also unclear as to whether the Bush Administration will allow these funds to go toward the purchase of generic antiretroviral drugs. The *Wall Street Journal* (2/24/04) reported Global AIDS Coordinator Randall Tobias (appointed to oversee PEPFAR) as saying that the Administration is "open" to the use of generics even though the PEPFAR plan clearly leans toward the use of patented drugs.

While the Global Campaign shares these serious concerns, we nevertheless welcome the inclusion of microbicides as a discreet plan component. We were particularly encouraged to see a decisive statement supporting the concept of microbicides, which was articulated more affirmatively than might have been expected in the current political climate. The Report states that, “In the absence of a safe and effective vaccine, the options for sexually active women – particularly those who are coerced or forced to have sex – to protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections remain minimal. A safe and effective topical microbicide (i.e., an antimicrobial product applied topically that inhibits or inactivates HIV) would offer another means of protection for women beyond condoms.”

The language in the “Microbicides” section of the plan makes the following commitments:

- “Under the Emergency Plan, NIH will expand the HIV Prevention Trials Network, a worldwide network for collaborative multidisciplinary, multi-site clinical trials established by NIH to evaluate the safety and efficacy of non-vaccine HIV prevention interventions.
- NIH has also spearheaded an effort to develop a U.S. Government strategic plan for microbicides, which incorporates the microbicide activities of agencies within HHS such as NIH, CDC, and the Food and Drug Administration, as well as USAID. This strategic plan provides a blueprint for a coordinated effort structured to address each step involved in developing and testing potential microbicides and their subsequent implementation in prevention activities.”

The US Congress mandated development of this strategic plan by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) over two years ago. The Global Campaign and other microbicide advocates anxiously await its long-delayed publication.

2. UNAIDS Launches New Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

On February 2nd, 2004, UNAIDS formally launched the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, a new initiative designed to spearhead concrete actions to reduce women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The Coalition is an informal grouping of partners and organizations working to mitigate the impact of AIDS on women and girls. In the Coalition’s own words, it is a “growing, global, inclusive movement seeking to support, energize and drive AIDS-related programs and projects to improve the daily life of women and girls.”

The February 2nd event in London was the first meeting of the Coalition’s Steering Committee – a group of high level advocates, practitioners, United Nations representatives, celebrities and individuals with political access – who have been convened to guide the initiative and to champion the issue of women and AIDS. Steering committee members were nominated by a broad range of partners (UN co-sponsors, NGOs, people living with HIV) and will serve as emissaries in their own settings for women and AIDS issues.

The coalition itself has only limited funds, but it hopes to help catalyze “issue working groups” to pursue joint action on concrete topics. Through a series of earlier consultations, the Coalition identified 7 topics as its priority themes:

1. Preventing HIV infection among girls and young women, including access to reproductive health care
2. Reducing violence against women (highlighting the links to HIV vulnerability)
3. Protecting the property ownership and inheritance rights of women and girls
4. Ensuring equal access by women and girls to care and treatment
5. Supporting improved community-based care, with special focus on women and girls
6. Promoting access to prevention options for women including microbicides and female condoms
7. Support on-going efforts towards universal education for girls.

The Steering Committee endorsed these topics and issued a “Joint Statement” in support of the Coalition’s agenda and guiding principles.

Each of the “issue areas” will be coordinated by one or more groups that will serve as a focal point for action on that theme. The lead organizations will convene working groups of NGOs and others to pursue

coordinated action on that issue. **The Global Campaign for Microbicides has been selected as one of the lead organizers for plank 6 on the female condom and microbicides.** GCM will provide technical assistance to the UNAIDS secretariat on these issues and will co-convene a global working group to take the prevention tools' agenda forward.

Where was the female condom?

On February 2nd the Steering Committee meeting took up three of the Coalition's seven overall topics, including property rights, violence against women and girl's education. The remaining four topics will be addressed at the Committee's next meeting in September.

Although microbicides were not a focus topic at the February meeting, several Committee members chose to highlight microbicides during the UNAIDS-sponsored press conference as did some of the press materials circulated to reporters. This was good news for microbicides, but bad news for the female condom. The 6th plank of the Coalition agenda explicitly includes advocacy on behalf of the female condom in addition to microbicides, but much of the collateral material of the Coalition ignored the female condom. This unacceptable oversight was pointed out by several participants in the "gender-aids forum" who rightfully observed that enthusiasm for a potential future product should not be allowed to eclipse focus on a woman-initiated method that already exists.

Fortunately, UNAIDS does appear committed to ensuring that the female condom receives adequate attention in the context of the Coalition, and plans to reach out to the Female Health Company to ensure that this happens. As one of the conveners of the Prevention Tools Group, the Global Campaign can also work to keep attention on the female condom. But the Global Coalition press material is a good example of how easy it is to have intentions and agendas distorted, when materials are prepared by communications experts for media consumption.

3. Conference speaker expresses cautious optimism on microbicide development

A plenary presentation at the Eleventh Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in San Francisco by Dr. Robin Shattock from St George's Hospital Medical School, London, UK, expressed cautious optimism about the development of microbicides. Dr. Shattock reviewed recent scientific developments and set the scene for next month's Microbicides 2004 conference in London, for which he co-chairs the Basic Science track committee.

For the full article, *Opportunities and challenges on the route to effective microbicides* by Julian Meldrum, [click here](#)

4. Invitation to GCM's pre-conference to Microbicides 2004

The Global Campaign invites you to the pre-conference, "Microbicides Overview for Advocates" at the Imperial College in London on Sunday, March 28th from 8:30am – 2:30pm. **Please note the time change from earlier announcements – we will be starting at 8:30am.** This pre-conference will give you the background and the understanding of pressing issues in the microbicides field. You will receive overviews on the science, research and development, and clinical trials as well as learn about what you can do as advocates to organize around access, community involvement in clinical trials and resource mobilization. For more information and to register for this free pre-conference, click on [Microbicides 2004 Pre-Conference](#).

5. Creative Collaborations for Microbicide Awareness

By Grisel M. Robles, Policy Associate at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and coordinator of the Beyond Latex microbicide campaign.

Chicago's microbicide advocacy campaign, Beyond Latex, was recently selected as a beneficiary of the Chicago V-Day production of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues. This fundraising event, occurring in cities around the world every February 14, is part of the worldwide movement to stop violence against women and girls. The Chicago V-Day organizers selected Beyond Latex, a project of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) and a Global Campaign affiliate, as an event beneficiary in recognition of the need to develop more woman controlled HIV & STD prevention tools (in both contraceptive and non-contraceptive formulations).

Beyond Latex Coordinator Grisel Robles was asked to organize a microbicides presentation as one of the promotional events leading up to the Vagina Monologues performance. With the help of Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT), AFC's co-beneficiary, and the V-Day organizers, Grisel secured a local martial arts center as a venue, obtained donated refreshments and put together a *very* creative presentation focusing on women's healthy sexuality.

In "*All Hail the Coochie*", performance artist Sharon Powell opened the program by celebrating women's bodies and sexuality. Sarah Deysach of *Early to Bed* sex toy products then reminded participants of the importance of self-pleasure. Grisel followed up with an interactive discussion on the use of female and male condoms and a preview of microbicide products currently in research. Using poetry, SWWT staffers Souzan Naser and Jaime Huseman concluded the session with a dialogue about common forms of domestic violence and its impact. Over 25 women from all over Chicago participated in the event, sharing personal stories and perspectives on each topic. The collaboration was a great success!

6. Female Condom Launched in India

By Bobby Ramakant, Key Correspondent to Health & Development Networks; Edited by Ananthu Thambinayagam

The female condom - the first female-initiated prevention option offering dual protection against HIV/STIs and unwanted pregnancies - was launched in India on February 13, 2004, by the Indian Family Welfare Secretary P.K. Hota.

As women have been found to be four times more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, the launch of the female condom in India is indeed a big boon to women who are rarely in a position to negotiate or insist on male condom use or abandon relationships that put them at risk of disease or unwanted pregnancy.

At the ceremony Prasad Rao, the Secretary of Health of India, said that the 'female condom should be looked upon as a combination of a contraceptive as well as [an] STI/HIV reduction method'. He said that the female condom is 'adding to the armory' of prevention options as well as women's empowerment. Rao noted however, that launching the female condom is not enough, as we need to couple it with well-planned programs for promotion and increase access and acceptability. Recent acceptability and feasibility studies conducted in three Indian states showed a reported rate of over 90% consistent use of the female condom. Anne Philpott, International Program Manager of the London-based Female Health

Company (FHC) strongly noted that the challenge to address is not demand of the female condom but rather maintaining and expanding a consistent supply.

A concerted effort to manufacture the female condom at an affordable cost have been driven by FHC in partnership with India's local manufacturers - Hindustan Latex Limited (HLL). HLL is currently marketing female condoms in India and aims to sell 1 million annually at 45 rupees each before the start of manufacturing in Kerala, India. According to the *Times of India*, with duty reductions and subsidies, the cost could be brought down to 12 rupees if 10 million female condoms can be marketed annually.

Dr. Radium Bhattacharya, President of Indian Network of NGOs on HIV/AIDS commented that she is glad to see the launch of the female condom and outcomes of the acceptability studies, as it increases acceptability from women and men of female-initiated methods, such as microbicides.

For more information on this issue, click on: <http://www.global-campaign.org/article-343.htm>

7. US advocates creating a Microbicides presence at the March for Women's Lives

US advocates will be working to make microbicides a highly visible part of the reproductive rights agenda at the massive March for Women's Lives taking place in Washington, DC on Sunday, April 25, 2004.

This "public demonstration of historic size", expected to attract at least one million participants, has been organized because American women's reproductive rights are under attack as they have not been in over a decade. The March aims to "demonstrate overwhelming majority support for a woman's right to choose safe, legal abortion and birth control". The March is a collaborative effort by seven women's rights groups as well as hundreds of co-sponsors. For more information, check the March website at: www.marchforwomen.org

The Global Campaign has co-sponsored the March, and our enthusiastic participation will underscore the point that the right to safe, effective, user-controlled HIV prevention methods is a vital component of the reproductive rights agenda. We will be marching behind a Global Campaign banner, handing out information on microbicides, and otherwise seizing this fantastic opportunity to meet people from all over the country and talk about our issues. If you are interested in joining the Global Campaign for Microbicides and our partners at the March, please send an email to bpatel@path-dc.org

8. New North America coordinator at Global Campaign

The Global Campaign for Microbicides is delighted to welcome Bindiya Patel to our staff as Coordinator of Global Campaign/North America (formerly Anna Forbes' job) and Information Officer. Anna, as Global North Programs Coordinator, now serves a range of other administrative functions including oversight of all Global Campaign activities in North America and Europe.

Originally trained as an environmental engineer, Bindiya earned a Masters in Public Affairs from Princeton and has been doing gender and health work for the past several years. Most recently, she helped coordinate outreach at Philani Nutrition Center, a maternal and pediatric health clinic serving the townships outside of Cape Town, where she witnessed first hand the enormous impact of the HIV pandemic. Other previous employers include the Bank Information Center, a DC-based watchdog group

at which Bindiya coordinated groups of activists to monitor World Bank projects and policies, and Action in Rural Sussex, a British community development agency at which Bindiya served as grants officer providing funding for projects serving disadvantaged children and parents.

Anna Forbes notes that “Bindiya brings an unusual blend of person-to-person organizing experience and web-based organizing skills to this job, which is exactly what we were looking for. In addition to the North American organizing piece, she will be streamlining and enhancing our website, editing GC News and responding to continuous flow of information queries we receive.” In that capacity, Bindiya invites feedback and suggestions from GC News readers who can contact her at bpatel@path-dc.org

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.