

US & Latin American AIDS Advocates Blast CAFTA's Anti-Generic Drug Provisions
PR Newswire
June 2, 2005

LOS ANGELES -- AIDS advocates with expertise on the HIV crisis among Latin Americans today called on Congress to protect access to low-cost generic HIV medications now available in Central America but threatened by the proposed Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

"Poor Central Americans with AIDS will pay for CAFTA with their lives, since thousands of patients today rely on generics and CAFTA would cut off such access," said Jessie Gruttadauria of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), which operates three free HIV clinics in Honduras that offer AIDS care and generic antiretroviral medications. "We are calling on the Bush administration to abandon its ongoing hostility to generic AIDS medications in developing world countries, and we call on Congress to reject these provisions of CAFTA."

Oscar De La O, President & CEO of Bienestar Human Services, said, "Access to low-cost HIV medication is as important in Latin America as it is here in the States: HIV infection does not recognize borders and the trans-border migration obligates us all to ensure that people everywhere have access to HIV/AIDS medications."

Denise Main, MD, who raises funds for Honduran AIDS patients through Siempre Unidos' three free clinics, said: "It is critical for our patients currently on generic anti-retrovirals to have access to these medications to continue their treatment. Many of our patients enter treatment in our program at risk for medication resistance because of prior episodic use of donated antiretroviral medications. We will need a program that allows for future generics -- and not just those currently licensed in Honduras -- to stem the tide of AIDS."

Prisci Orozovich said on behalf of Agencia Binacional Familiar (AFABI): "Restricting access to proven effective generic antiretroviral treatments will undermine the efforts developing countries make to prevent the spread of HIV. It also makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to provide treatment services to those suffering from AIDS. The opportunities developing countries have to implement best practices in public health to stem the spread of HIV will be curtailed, leaving them vulnerable and dependent on other countries. In the past, countries such as Brazil have been successful in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS because of the ability to provide generic antiretroviral treatments at a reasonable cost allowing them flexibility to cover important prevention services. We are gravely concerned that CAFTA will limit the opportunity that Latin American countries have to participate in the global struggle against AIDS. We are calling on Congress to support the efforts to stop, not contribute, to the spread of HIV worldwide."

As reported recently in the Los Angeles Times, CAFTA nations such as Guatemala and Honduras currently allow sale of generic versions of anti-retroviral treatments at prices much more affordable to both patients and local governments. "In Honduras, a year's supply of HIV treatment is a few hundred dollars, compared to the US average of \$12,000, for a year's supply," said Gruttadauria. "Central Americans with AIDS simply cannot afford CAFTA. The US is demanding that Honduras, Guatemala and other nations hard hit by HIV change their laws to mirror US policy, which will ultimately kill access to life-saving generics."

Today's announcement launches a coalition effort by leading AIDS advocates in the US and Latin America, who will work together to speak out against CAFTA's anti-generic provisions. The coalition includes:

* AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), the largest AIDS organization in the US which operates free AIDS treatment clinics in the US, Africa, Central America and Asia including three HIV treatment clinics using generic medications in Honduras (<http://www.aidshealth.org/>); * Agencia Binacional Familiar, A.C., which provides medical and support services in Mexico (<http://www.afabi.org/>); * Bienestar Human Services, Inc., which provides support services and advocacy for Latinos in California, of whom many are Central American immigrants (<http://www.bienestar.org/>); * Siempre Unidos, a California-based non-profit that funds treatment and support programs in Honduras (<http://www.siempreunidos.org/>) AIDS Healthcare Foundation