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**Statement on International Women's Day**

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SILVER SPRING, MD – Recent months have brought much news, both good and bad, about new technologies currently being researched for the prevention of HIV. We have seen new data indicating that male circumcision can significantly reduce men's risk of infection, and the launch of the first vaccine efficacy trial in Africa. These are hopeful developments.

More sobering, however, was the news that trials of a microbicide candidate closed early due to concerns that the product may have increased women's risk of HIV infection. And this week, researchers announced that despite the benefits of circumcision for men, the procedure does not seem to protect the female partners of HIV-infected men who have been circumcised, at least in the short term.

When all of this news is put together, sadly, women remain, for the most part, without any real protection from this disease. We know that the current "ABC" approach (Abstaining from sex, Being faithful to one partner and using Condoms) is not enough to protect many women. Abstinence is not a realistic option for many adults, particularly those who are married or in long-term relationships. A woman may not be able to convince her partner to use condoms—or she and her partner may want to have children, which they cannot do while abstaining or using condoms. And remaining faithful to her husband cannot protect a woman whose husband is not monogamous.

Women desperately need prevention options in addition to ABC. We are obligated to provide women with better tools to keep themselves from harm. Scientific innovation can be difficult and unpredictable, and we must constantly keep in mind that the vast majority of interventions that begin the development process will fail. But when success finally occurs, millions benefit. Developing a safe and effective microbicide that women could use to prevent HIV infection would mark a major milestone in our response to the AIDS epidemic.

On this International Women's Day, as we celebrate women's strengths and achievements, we must pledge to do more to protect women from HIV infection. All of us who are involved in HIV prevention—from laboratory scientists to ministries of health, from international donors to community health educators, and, most importantly, the tens of thousands of women and men who are volunteering to participate in clinical trials—must redouble our efforts to ensure that women, in particular, have a range of safe, effective, accessible and user-friendly tools to protect themselves from this devastating disease. We must continue to expand the microbicide pipeline with the most

effective drugs and determine their safety and effectiveness in women as rapidly as possible. Taking the next step toward combating AIDS means acting on the knowledge that what's good for the world's most vulnerable women is, in fact, good for us all.

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