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International Women's Day Statement by IPM CEO, Dr. Zeda Rosenberg

As the world commemorates International Women's Day, the International Partnership for Microbicides urges the world's leaders to redouble efforts to develop new tools to enable women to better protect themselves from HIV by dramatically increasing support for the development of new, women-initiated prevention options such as microbicides. On a day that celebrates women, it is imperative they be guaranteed the tools to secure healthy futures for themselves and their families.

Being female, married and poor are often the most significant risk factors for acquiring the infection, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where women account for 57 percent of adults (aged 15-49) living with HIV/AIDS. For young women, the figures are even worse: Worldwide, 75 percent of young people infected with HIV are women and girls. The ABC approach (Abstinence, Being faithful and using Condoms), up to now the most prominent prevention strategy, has proven insufficient for protecting many women.

Women's increased susceptibility to HIV infection results from a combination of biological, social and cultural factors. The feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic calls for research into new prevention technologies that women can initiate and control, such as microbicides.

Microbicides are products that could be applied topically to the vagina to reduce the transmission of HIV during sexual intercourse. Microbicides could take the form of a gel, cream, film, suppository, sponge or vaginal ring that releases the active ingredient gradually. This could indirectly reduce HIV infection in men and children, and substantially reduce the global spread of the virus.

Once developed, microbicides will be a critical element in helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of addressing the disproportionate impact of the epidemic on women. To protect individuals, preserve families, and control the spread of disease, we must seriously focus our efforts on the population at greatest risk of becoming infected: women in developing countries.

I urge global leaders to address this issue with urgency, and devote greater resources to microbicide development.

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About IPM

The International Partnership for Microbicides was established to accelerate the development and accessibility of microbicides to prevent the transmission of HIV in women. By screening compounds, designing optimal formulations, establishing manufacturing capacity, developing trial sites and conducting large scale efficacy trials, the organization works to improve the efficiency of all efforts to develop and deliver safe and effective microbicides as soon as possible.

IPM is a co-convener of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS' (UNAIDS') Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (<http://womenandaids.unaids.org/>). More information on IPM is available at www.ipm-microbicides.org.