

Honda Statement Commemorating World AIDS Day

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According to estimates from UNAIDS, an umbrella group for five U.N. agencies, the World Bank and the World Health Organization, 40 million people in the world have AIDS – 24.5 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that AIDS deaths and the loss of future population from the deaths of women of child-bearing age means that by 2010, sub-Saharan Africa will have 71 million fewer people than it would otherwise.

I have worked hard to raise the issue of AIDS in the consciousness of Congress. I have consistently supported legislation that increased funding levels for AIDS research, such as Appropriations Committee requests for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. I joined my Colleagues Barbara Lee (CA-09) and Frank Pallone (NJ-06) in requesting an earmark of \$35 million in the Fiscal year 2007 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill to support vaccine trials and research through the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI). This important non-profit organization works towards the development of safe, effective, accessible, and preventive HIV vaccines. While I support legislation that increases funding for HIV/AIDS programs, I believe the U.S. is far from providing an adequate response to the crisis.

As Chair of the Congressional Ethiopia and Ethiopian American Caucus, one of my main priorities is supporting the efforts of Diaspora communities to organize their resources and contribute to the development of their home country. One such organization is the Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA). This organization is composed of Ethiopians who practice medicine in the Diaspora, but travel back annually to volunteer their health services at home. I agree with Founder and President, Dr. Ingida Asfaw that, "It is so important for Ethiopian Americans to come together and organize themselves and work with other African immigrant community groups in the United States, in order to appeal and request for federal funding to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic that is wrecking havoc on Ethiopian and African peoples....This is ENAHPA's mission."

I had the privilege of traveling with them to Ethiopia in 2005 and I was able to interact with their patients at of their HIV/AIDS clinics. I saw first hand the cultural, political, and economic causes of this epidemic, and I was impressed by their dedication to solve each of these issues. I decided to request \$200,000 in the Foreign Operations House Bill for FY 2007 to support them.

Now, more than ever, I believe that the U.S. should be the leader in the international effort to combat this deadly pandemic. You can be sure I will work to achieve this goal.