

Statement by U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Merten on the occasion of 2009 World AIDS Day

Haiti and the U.S. Remain Strong Partners in the Fight against HIV/AIDS

Today, on World AIDS Day 2009, we gather as a global community to recognize and celebrate these successes. The U.S. President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief -- PEPFAR -- has been the largest U.S. Government commitment to any single disease in history. Just six years ago, only 50,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa had access to antiretroviral treatment. Now, the World Health Organization estimates that over 4 million individuals in low- and middle-income nations have access to HIV treatment. The American people, through PEPFAR, support more than half of those men, women and children in treatment around the world.

Here in Haiti, there are many important victories to celebrate, and none of them would have been possible without Haiti's commitment and hard work. The AIDS prevalence rate in Haiti has dropped by half since the 90's, to 2.2 percent of the population. Haiti is a world leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and Haitian experts are now showing other countries how to succeed.

The U.S. Government, through PEPFAR has invested over half a billion dollars over the past 5 years to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment efforts in Haiti. Before

PEPFAR there was little access to care. Together with our Haitian partners, we have tested more than 1.7 million people and provide AIDS treatment to over 24,000 people. There are now improved lab facilities, trained medical staff and strengthened civil society organizations in Haiti to help fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. Together, we have kept vulnerable people healthy and in the workforce, which is important to Haiti's economy. PEPFAR has teamed up with many other programs to offer training, job placement and short-term economic help to HIV-positive people and their families. Last month, together with the Ministry of Health and other organizations, the United States also helped launch a community-based health program that will provide support to 100,000 people – especially children -- in small communities all around Les Cayes.

We also know that HIV/AIDS programs alone will not defeat this disease. As part of the United States' Global Health Initiative, outlined by U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, PEPFAR will support Haiti's work to build up permanent health care capacity here in Haiti, expanding tuberculosis and malaria treatment, maternal and child health care and family planning assistance. As we work together, we must also tackle human rights challenges that drive the spread of HIV, such as social stigma and lack of strong mechanisms to protect the rights of women and children. We want to help build up Haiti's health system and its communities, as an investment in Haiti's future.

I have seen first-hand the importance of Haitian leadership, and its contribution to reducing AIDS prevalence here. We

will continue to work together with all sectors of Haitian society, to support Haiti's strategy to stop HIV/AIDS. Today, the United States congratulates Haiti on its victories, and we rededicate ourselves to our partnership with Haiti in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.