

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 1, 2004

RECOGNIZING WORLD AIDS DAY 2004

Dear Colleague:

As we observe World AIDS DAY on December 1, 2004, the Women's Caucus would like to draw your attention to this year's campaign, World AIDS Day 2004: *Women, Girls and HIV and AIDS*. It is important for Congress to recognize the devastating impact the AIDS pandemic has on women in the United States and around the world. At the same time, we can be heartened by the progress that is being made in raising awareness and developing effective prevention methods.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection. Globally, women make up 60% of the 15-24 year olds who are HIV positive. Worldwide, young women and girls are 2.5 times more likely to be HIV-infected as their male counterparts. Gender inequality fuels the epidemic, as women in many countries have less access to employment, property and education in comparison to men.

The latest study shows that HIV and AIDS are having an ever-increasing impact on women and girls. In South Africa, girls make up 75% of those infected with HIV, while in Kenya, there are 45 young women with the virus for every 10 young men with HIV. The AIDS epidemic has also hit hard at home. In the United States, African American and Hispanic women account for 80% of AIDS reported cases in the last twenty years, yet make up less than one quarter of all women in the U.S.

However, HIV prevention education can positively impact women living with AIDS and reduce the number of HIV/AIDS cases worldwide. For example, JHPIEGO, an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University, provides prevention education and support to women and family members affected by HIV/AIDS in various countries. In Jamaica, where their program has trained more than 900 counselors; HIV counseling and testing is now routine, and 90% of pregnant women attending public clinics are tested for HIV.

On this day, people around the globe will celebrate the progress made in the battle against AIDS, while raising awareness about the challenges that remain. World AIDS Day 2004 is a day of hope for a world without HIV and AIDS.

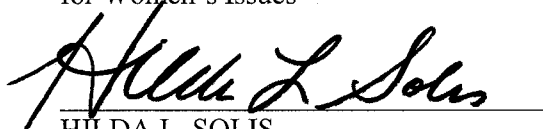
Sincerely,



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Co-Chair, Congressional Caucus
for Women's Issues



SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO
Co-Chair, Congressional Caucus
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