



PRESS RELEASE

28 November 2007

AFRICAN AIDS VACCINE PROGRAMME FOURTH FORUM

FIRST LADY OF RWANDA JOINS DRIVE FOR HIV/AIDS VACCINES AS SUCH EFFORTS INCREASE IN AFRICA

Abuja – The African AIDS Vaccine Programme today announced the nomination of its high-level advocate for advancing the cause of research and development of HIV/AIDS vaccines for Africans.

Mrs Jeannette Kagame, the First Lady of Rwanda, has been appointed as High Representative of AAVP. In this capacity, she will help raise awareness among decision makers in support of HIV vaccine research and development and of this Programme.

"It is a great honour that Madame Kagame has accepted this very important responsibility," said Dr Pontiano Kaleebu, Chairman, African AIDS Vaccine Programme Steering Committee. "Such high level engagement is crucial for the sustained political, financial and community support for HIV vaccine research and development in Africa," he added.

The nomination comes as efforts are increasing within Africa regarding the development of HIV vaccines.

"Substantial progress has been made throughout Africa to ensure the active participation of African stakeholders in all areas of HIV/AIDS vaccine research and development," said Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Director, WHO Initiative for Vaccine Research.

"Our realistic hope is that with a future AIDS vaccine, plus other prevention and treatment measures, we can end this devastating epidemic," she added, while at the Fourth Forum of the AAVP which is taking place from 28 to 30 November in Abuja.

AAVP has played an important role in promoting Africa's establishment and implementation of national policies and strategies related to the development and use of future HIV vaccines. Since 1999, when the first HIV/AIDS vaccine trial was conducted in Africa, there have been more than 12 trials in eight African countries. The financial investment on the continent in this area has increased significantly.

Moreover, as announced at the Forum, four new centres of excellence are being established in Africa to build and strengthen capacity in the most crucial areas of HIV vaccines work:

- Biomedical research: a network of three institutes in Dakar, Senegal, Entebbe, Uganda and Capetown, South Africa.
- Regulatory issues: location to be determined
- Ethics, law and human rights: Pietersmaritzburg, South Africa
- Communication and media: Nairobi, Kenya

The development of HIV vaccines will neither be easy nor will it be fast, due to numerous scientific, financial and logistic challenges. Results from the third, large-scale, phase III HIV/AIDS vaccine trial will be available in 2008-09. The trial began in 2003 in Thailand. Valuable information to be gained from this trial will influence next steps in this noble scientific quest.

For further information, please contact: Melinda Henry, WHO Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals, Geneva; Mobile: (+41 79) 477 17 38; Tel: (+41 22) 791 2535, E-mail: henrym@who.int or Andrei Muchnik; Mobile: (+41 79) 477 2693; E-mail: Andrei.muchnik@gmail.com. All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features can be obtained on the WHO web site: <http://www.who.int>.