



May 3, 2004

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
USA

RE: Limited DHHS Participation in the XV International AIDS Conference

Dear Secretary Thompson:

On behalf of the Thai Ministry of Public Health and the International AIDS Society, and as co-chairs of the XV International AIDS Conference, we want to express our regret about the limited participation and contribution of US researchers in the Conference this July in Bangkok. To date, the number of delegates registered to attend this year's Conference already exceeds that for each of the last two Conferences, and we are anticipating that Bangkok will have an enormously positive impact on global awareness of access issues related to HIV/AIDS.

As in years past, the Conference will serve as an important venue for leading scientists from around the world, including those from the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other agencies in DHHS to present their research to the broader global community. This year, the scientific program is expected to include presentations on a range of critically important research, including but not limited to: the latest data on mother-to-child transmission of HIV and management of pediatric HIV/AIDS; evaluation of traditional and new prevention strategies; the first results of the newer HIV vaccine trials; scientific evaluations of the recently implemented HAART programs in developing countries; and results from some of the first HIV/AIDS programs supported through Global Fund financing.

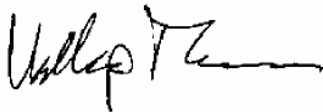
It is unfortunate that the travel restrictions posed on US government researchers will now prevent a number of scientists from presenting their vital research during the first International AIDS Conference to take place in Southeast Asia. Although the full effect of the more limited participation of US scientists is not yet clear, as a result of cancellations of three US satellite meetings so far, we will no longer benefit from hearing presentations on testing options for measuring HIV incidence, enhancing psycho-social support for children affected by HIV/AIDS and advancing HIV prevention and care in the Asian context.

Since their inception, the International AIDS Conferences have changed the way the world thinks and acts on AIDS on a broad range of issues. Since the first Conference in Atlanta in 1985, there have been major advances – both scientific and political – with the International AIDS Conferences serving as the major backdrop for such developments from the first presentations on triple therapy, to the movement to reduce the cost of therapy in some areas.

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It is our understanding that the travel restrictions are based on budget restrictions. Please therefore let us know if there is anything we can do to work with our sponsors to help finance these researchers to attend the Conference. A new International AIDS Conference program on leadership will be introduced for the first time in Bangkok and your scientists represent many of the leaders in AIDS research, we would be delighted if they could be there for this landmark occasion.

Warm personal regards,



Dr. Vallop Thaineau
Thai Ministry of Public Health
Co-Chair



Dr. Joep MA Lange
International AIDS Society
Co-Chair