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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. EMBASSY OBSERVES WORLD AIDS DAY THROUGHOUT TAJIKISTAN

Dushanbe, Tajikistan, December 5, 2011 - The U.S Embassy, in close collaboration with local partners, marked World AIDS Day with programs and events throughout Tajikistan to foster awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Events at health centers, public awareness campaigns, AIDS awareness presentations and concerts, and a worldwide poster contest all helped to combat the spread of this deadly virus.

Ambassador Gross hosted activists and NGO leaders living with HIV for a discussion at his residence in Dushanbe on Friday, December 2. The meeting was devoted to a discussion of HIV in Tajikistan and the impact on the lives of those affected by the epidemic.

The International Narcotics and Law Enforcement section of the U.S. Embassy partnered with the Center of Investigative Journalism and Radio Vatan and organized an anti-drug concert called Fighting for Life at the National Philharmonic Hall in Dushanbe on Saturday, December 3. The concert taught youth about the dangers of drug abuse by highlighting the tragic story of singer and composer Subhon Said, who is a recovered heroin addict.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored World AIDS Day events at health center #10 in Dushanbe, the health center in Vahdat, and held public awareness campaigns in Kulob, Khujand, and Qurghonteppa. At these events, health care providers and representatives from the city AIDS centers provided information and conducted consultations on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted infections. Free HIV tests and vouchers for free tests were available. USAID also sponsored a dialogue on HIV and TB with the Ministry of Health, government representatives, and non-governmental organizations at the Writer's House in Dushanbe on Thursday, December 1.

Ambassador Gross also opened an international conference on HIV control in Tajikistan. The U.S Government, along with the Global Fund to fight HIV, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and other partners, supported this regional scientific conference on HIV initiated by the Ministry of Health in Dushanbe's Vahdat Conference Hall December 5-6.

At the opening ceremony, Ambassador Gross remarked, "In Tajikistan, we have a golden opportunity to stop the HIV epidemic before it becomes a widespread problem. To do this, we need widespread testing, effective prevention activities, and continued treatment for those who are living with HIV."

On December 1, the U.S. Embassy launched a poster contest sponsored by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The theme of this year's poster contest is Leading with Science, Uniting for Action. Children and youth ages 5 to 20 can submit posters focused on HIV/AIDS to any American Corner before February 3. Winning posters from Tajikistan will be entered into a worldwide completion for a chance to win art supplies and recognition from Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator.

Since 1988, World AIDS Day has been observed on December 1 to raise awareness of the fight against HIV/AIDS. U.S. Embassy sponsored events in Tajikistan raise HIV awareness, improve the quality of life for people living with HIV, reduce stigma and discrimination for those at-risk of HIV infection, and foster closer ties between health care providers, HIV non-governmental organizations, and at-risk individuals. Over the past 10 years, the U.S. Embassy has worked to prevent the spread of HIV in Central Asia and to improve the quality of care received by people living with HIV.

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