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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. AMBASSADOR HOSTS PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

Dushanbe, Tajikistan, December 2, 2011 - Ambassador Ken Gross hosted activists and NGO leaders living with HIV (PLHIV) for a discussion at his residence in Dushanbe on December 2, 2011. The meeting was devoted to a discussion of HIV in Tajikistan and the lives of those affected by the epidemic. The event also marked World AIDS Day, which has been observed by the international community since 1988 to raise awareness of the fight against HIV/AIDS and to support people living with HIV.

During the informal meeting with these courageous leaders, the Ambassador openly and freely discussed issues related to the HIV in Tajikistan. The topics of the discussion included the risks of the growing epidemic, stigma and discrimination associated to HIV, and the role of civil society and the PLHIV in promoting HIV prevention in Tajikistan.

Ambassador Gross commented, "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. None of this will work if we are too afraid to openly discuss the problem and through our ignorance prevent people from the services they need."

Even though the HIV prevalence among the general population in Tajikistan is low, it poses a serious risk of spreading rapidly. Intravenous drug users account for the largest number of new HIV infections. Sexual transmission of HIV is also increasing. Stigma and discrimination towards the most-at-risk populations from law enforcement, health care providers, and the community is reported by many agencies and implementers of assistance projects, including those funded by USG.

Through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. Government is helping to build universal access for HIV prevention, care, and treatment to millions of people affected by HIV worldwide, including Tajikistan. Over the past decade, several U.S. Government-funded projects have 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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