Editor’s Letter

Born Free

October 1, 2008 By Regan Hofmann

I have just returned from visiting Kenya and South Africa with Pam Barnes, CEO of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), to study the group’s work in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV in developing nations. The foundation is funded, in part, by U.S. federal grants via the now $48 billion President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, (PEPFAR). Part of me wanted to see whether our American dollars were making a difference in a country, like Kenya, that has a National AIDS Strategy. And part of me wanted to see a lion, in the wild.

My friends thought I was nuts to spend my vacation in African AIDS clinics. “But you should be on a beach,” one insisted. “You need to rest,” another urged. One friend warned me about the emotional shock of witnessing people living in unspeakable poverty and children dying in their teenage mothers’ arms.

My friends were right: It was shocking, sad and humbling to observe the path that AIDS is tearing through countries so underdeveloped that you must take four spare tires to drive the roads for any distance. It is down those same roads that women walk for miles, in labor, to reach an AIDS clinic to get tested and, if positive, get medicated and treat their newborn babies so they do not contract HIV. While sitting watching a 16-year-old girl give AZT to her just-birthed child, a part of me longed to be sitting with an ocean breeze in my face and a frosty drink in my hand. But my friends were also wrong: I was inspired, fortified and overjoyed at discovering what can be done with some cold hard cash, some knowledge of HIV prevention and some dedication on the part of AIDS organizations (like EGPAF), health care workers and health ministers. Oh yes, and a functioning National AIDS Strategy.

The United States demands that all countries receiving PEPFAR funds provide their blueprint for combating AIDS. Ironically, as we go to press, the United States has no National AIDS Strategy of its own.

We at *POZ* want to politely remind whoever next resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue of the community’s—and country’s—dire need for a clear plan of attack against HIV/AIDS. So, for this issue, we’ve listed goals that we, the HIV-positive people of America, would like to see the next president achieve during his first 100 days in office. We also share the results of our political poll. We’re not saying whom to vote for, but we will say this: Be sure to vote. The nearly 750,000

people who know they are HIV positive in the United States represent a massive swing vote. Candidates, are you listening?

On my last morning in Nairobi, I saw a lion, in the wild. The safari driver let me climb on top of the truck so that nothing stood between me and the male lion. Seeing me, the lion lifted his great head and let out a roar that sent me flying back into the truck. It was the kind of roar I expected, but did not hear, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's new numbers for higher HIV incidence were released this summer at the XVII International AIDS Conference. It was a warning roar, a roar of outrage, a roar of defiance. A roar that we must let loose. We can no longer be silent. Despite the fact that AIDS is preventable, 56,300 people contracted HIV in 2006. We need a National AIDS Strategy. They work. Case in point: In one South African hospital, the rate of people getting tested for HIV rose from 12 to 85 percent in just one year. As a result, uncountable lives have been saved.

If we can ensure that children in the developing world are born free of HIV, we can certainly do a better job fighting AIDS at home. With the right plan, the right funding and the right people to execute it, it is possible to stop AIDS dead in its tracks.

Regan Hofmann
Editor in Chief
Email: editor-in-chief@poz.com

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/editors-letter-africa-hiv-15301-8836