Closing The Book On Vienna, Looking Toward Challenges In DC

August 4, 2010 By Larry Bryant

After a powerful speech by Waheedah Shabazz-El representing the U.S. Positive Womens' Network on 'Human Rights as a Conscious Achievement', the 2010 International AIDS Conference officially passed the baton to Washington D.C., site of the the 2012 conference. Before the U.S. & D.C. Community Partners accepted the IAC Globe, I addressed the audience.

Good afternoon. My name is Larry Bryant and I am a native Washingtonian. I am an African

American, heterosexual, and HIV positive since 1986.

I am proud to call home the next city and country that will host the 2012 International AIDS

Conference. I am proud that my President, Barack Obama, signed a historic this year that lifted entry restrictions allowing people living with HIV & AIDS to enter the U.S. However, that is not enough - not by a long shot.

Unless unrestricted to all, eliminating bans which are born from fear, ignorance, and discrimination then we have accomplished nothing. Ending the travel ban was supposed to be a major step in destroying the stigma engulfing individuals around the world infected and affected by HIV & AIDS. All we have done is shifted it to other marginalized and criminalized communities: sex workers, drug users, and ex-offenders. This only widens the gap between respect and reason. This ban is not just misguided, but sinister and stupid.

Mr. President and the U.S. Government, YOU must end the ban on allowing international sex workers, drug users, and ex-offenders to enter the country now.

IF YOU DO NOT END THE BAN, WE WILL SHAME YOU AT THE 2012

INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE.

My hometown of D.C. has an extraordinary opportunity as host city for the next International

AIDS Conference. As the stage and backdrop of the U.S. epidemic and its response, we have a unique and challenging task to set a global standard. Before that can happen, however, the District of Columbia, currently led by Mayor Adrian Fenty has a severe mess of an epidemic to address. If you have visited the Washington D.C. booth here in Vienna in the exhibition area, you have seen the images and bright shiny faces of middle class D.C. strolling across the National Mall. Those images are in sharp contrast to the D.C. I know and call home.

Devastating poverty, rising living and survival costs, and underfunded, under resourced, and

overwhelmed community based organizations have contributed to an HIV avalanche of epic proportions:

- *3% of all of D.C. residents or 20,000 individuals are HIV infected (75% are African American)*

- *severely reduced funding has either cut or eliminated prevention, education, care and services to women, young people, drug users, and the mentally ill,*
- *also, over 700 D.C. residents living with AIDS are on waiting lists for safe and supportive housing.*

How dare we in the Nation's Capital - Capital of the Free World - allow those most

marginalized and most in need to go without? What kind of example does that set for us and for all? Mayor Fenty and our city's leaders must do better.

MAYOR FENTY, IF YOU DON'T IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO END

D.C.'S HIV & AIDS EPIDEMIC, AT THE 2012 INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE WE WILL SHAME YOU.

I am also proud to represent the United States, which has one of the planets most diverse populations. We are a tapestry woven through over 200 years of perseverance, passion, and persistence. Yet despite our history - or maybe because of it - we allow social justice issues to drive wedges between us. Racism and homophobia, particularly in the South, are almost an acceptable and encouraged norm. Sexual violence, violence against women, girls, and transgendered individuals go unseen and unheard. Inequities and education, criminalization, and access lead to the disparities in health, resources, and hope.

These deficits must be meaningfully addressed if we are to truly end this epidemic. The Obama

National HIV & AIDS Strategy must be more ambitious. Right now, over 2500 individuals wait f

or life extending and life saving medications across the country that they cannot afford. At this rate, many will die even before the National HIV AIDS Strategy is implemented. We must fully fund and end the AIDS drug waiting lists once and for all. We must also implement a plan to improve access to quality care, particularly in rural areas.

PRESIDENT OBAMA IF YOU DO NOT SET TRULY AMBITIOUS GOALS FOR

YOUR NATIONAL HIV & AIDS STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, WE WILL SHAME YOU AT THE 2012 INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE IN YOUR BACKYARD.

We as a community have plenty to do to prepare for 2012 in D.C. and assuring the 'delivery of accountability'. I look forward to getting started today. Thank you.

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