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## **MEXICO CITY BECOMES FIRST IN LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN TO HOST WORLD'S LARGEST CONFERENCE ON HIV/AIDS**

Mexico has been chosen as the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean to host the biennial International AIDS Conference, the world's largest and most influential gathering on HIV/AIDS.

The XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) will be held from 3 to 8 August 2008 at the Banamex Convention Centre in Mexico City. The event will bring together the world's foremost researchers, health-care workers, civil society, policy makers, activists, people living with HIV/AIDS and donors, to share current knowledge on a full spectrum of issues about the global epidemic. With more than 2,500 international journalists expected to attend, the Conference is the single most widely covered health event in the world.

The conference is convened by the International AIDS Society, the world's leading membership organization representing professionals working in HIV/AIDS. It is organized in partnership with a number of international bodies and local partners, including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and civil society organizations.

"The International AIDS Conference provides us with the opportunity here in Mexico, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and around the world to expand public awareness of HIV/AIDS, share knowledge and learn from others in the field, and chart a course for a stronger and a more effective global response to the pandemic," said Pedro Cahn, Chair of AIDS 2008 and President-elect of the International AIDS Society.

AIDS 2008 will be the seventeenth in this series of international AIDS conferences. In August 2006, it will be held in Toronto, Canada, and the previous meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2004.

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Mexico was selected to host AIDS 2008 following an evaluation of candidate cities by IAS. Candidate cities were evaluated by the IAS governing council according to three criteria: Impact on the epidemic, infrastructure and freedom of movement for people living with HIV/AIDS.

“Of primary importance when deciding where to host this event is the assessment of its potential impact on the epidemic. As far as possible, the IAS Governing Council attempts to hold the conference in those areas of the world hardest hit by the epidemic. In 2000, the International AIDS Conference was held in Durban, South Africa, and in 2004, we took the conference to South East Asia (Bangkok). Latin America and the Caribbean was the next logical step,” explained Craig McClure, Executive Director of IAS.

On behalf of the Mexican Federal Government, Dr. Jorge Saavedra, General Director of CENSIDA, remarked how important it was for the country to host the International AIDS Conference, and expressed the government's commitment to the success of the event. “The choice made by IAS gives us the opportunity, and the responsibility, to do our best to make this conference a milestone in the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Mexico and in the whole region. We commit our full support in every way possible,” said Saavedra.

Dr. Luis Soto Ramirez, local co-chair of AIDS 2008, invited all involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Mexico to participate. “This conference should include all those who work in HIV/AIDS in the country in order to increase the response to the epidemic. Researchers, health-care workers, civil society organizations, groups of people living with HIV/AIDS and the government have to work together in order to ensure the success of the conference,” said Soto Ramirez.

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