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World AIDS Orphans Day: Advocates Celebrate Our Progress and Challenge the New U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator

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Co-authored by Albina du Boisrouvray

President Obama has nominated a Californian, Eric Goosby, to serve the White House as the Global AIDS Coordinator. As Dr. Goosby embarks on his tremendous mission in Washington, we in the advocacy community warmly welcome him and anticipate working closely together.

Today carries particularly special meaning for the orphans' advocacy community throughout the world, as we recognize World AIDS Orphans' Day. World AIDS Orphans Day is a grassroots campaign to draw attention to and advocate on behalf of the more than 15 million children orphaned by AIDS. Founded by FXB International, World AIDS Orphans Day began as a march on Wall Street in 2002 when activists held signs asking, "What is the value of an orphan on the NY Stock Exchange?"

Though we have made much progress since the launch of World AIDS Orphans Day in 2002, we must recognize that much is left to be done if we are to meet the needs of millions of vulnerable children. The statistics are still overwhelming. Twelve percent of all children in sub-Saharan Africa are orphans. One quarter of them have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. By 2010, UNAIDS estimates that there will be 15.7 million AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa -- according to various reports coming out of Russia and China, the global figure of AIDS orphans is potentially far higher. Worldwide, approximately 2.3 million children under age 15 currently live with HIV. Less than five percent of these HIV-positive children receive the anti-retroviral medicines they need.

Last year, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) was reauthorized by Congress along with TB and malaria programs with an unparalleled funding level of \$48 billion, including over \$3 billion dollars to care for kids in extreme poverty. Yet, the Global Health Plan budget released yesterday by the Obama administration does not to keep up with the progressive pace that Congress laid out only eight months ago. The global economic recession has forced many American policymakers to worry exclusively about American problems. Additionally, the recent struggles in Congress' budget resolution to fully fund the 150 Account, which is responsible for all foreign aid, can be interpreted as a warning that there will be future fights over the cost of lifesaving foreign aid programs.

But what would be the cost of our inaction? Focusing on family and community is not just about dollars and cents; it also makes practical sense. We need to recognize that there are multiple social and economic costs that follow a society's failure to address the needs of their most vulnerable members -- children. The cost of failure is simply too high to leave the future parents and leaders of our world behind. We cannot allow the littlest victims with limited social protection to fall through the cracks of this epidemic, and succumb to malnutrition, lack of education, and protection, or worse fate such as sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, or child soldiering. This is not only devastating for them, but for to future stability, and prosperity of our global future. We are already seeing the cost of inaction in Somalia, Northern Uganda and areas of other nations where social systems have broken down and pandemics and lawlessness have taken over.

We are eager to work with Dr. Goosby, a local San Franciscan and long time HIV/AIDS physician and activist. As the Global AIDS Coordinator, Dr. Goosby will be charged with leading our US efforts to fight HIV/AIDS in the hardest hit countries worldwide and he will face the challenge of pushing for full funding of the Congressionally authorized levels for HIV/AIDS. Dr. Goosby should know we expect him to be a fierce advocate for life saving HIV/AIDS and OVC programs; and he should expect our tireless support in return.

Albina du Boisrouvray, Founder and President of Association François-Xavier Bagnoud [FXB International]. Jennifer Delaney, Executive Director and President of the Board of Directors of Global Action for Children

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