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PRESS RELEASE

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The **Jamaica AIDS Support for Life** in celebrating **World AIDS Day 2013**, on December 1, is embarking on a week of activities in accordance with the national theme **“Zero Discrimination”**.

The **Jamaica AIDS Support for Life** is the oldest human rights/ HIV-focused non-governmental organization in the country, having started operations in 1991. The activities for the week include walk and talk sessions and testing across our three chapters in Kingston, Ocho Rios and Montego Bay however, our main focus this year is to target women. Thus, the activities will kick off with a social media campaign for the *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women* on November 25.

One in three women worldwide have been beaten or abused in their lifetime, usually by a family member or someone known to her. In some parts of the world a girl is more likely to be raped than to learn to read. Every year 60 million girls are sexually assaulted at, on their way to or on their way from school.

Despite the fact that these are global statistics the situation in the Caribbean is also cause for concern as one in every three women will experience gender-based violence at some point in her life. In Jamaica, the number of reported rape cases have steadily increased from 701 in 2009 to 724 in 2010. The issue of violence against women is not only global but local.

Violence against women, in any form, leads to a host of socio-economic issues. The fundamental human right to freedom of speech is compromised as many women across the world, the Caribbean and Jamaica are unable to speak out against injustices. The increase in reported rape cases is one cause for concern, but it must be taken into consideration that many cases go unreported. In 2012 the Director of Public Prosecutions in Britain revealed that 9 in 10 rape cases go unreported. Although this number may not be reflective of the situation in Jamaica, the number of reported rape cases is already an enormous problem; since Jamaica's rape rate is higher than the world average. Based on a United Nations / World Bank 2007 study the worldwide average for rape is 15 per 100,000 females and Jamaica has an average of 51 per 100,000 females.

Muffling the voices of the nation's women and subjecting them to sexual and physical violence has also contributed to HIV prevalence in Jamaica. The Caribbean region has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa. In Jamaica, 1.5 per cent of the population is living with HIV/AIDS. Despite a decrease in HIV-related deaths due to the increased distribution of anti-retrovirals there are many who are still unaware of their status or are unable to seek treatment.

“LOVE, ACTION & SUPPORT”

Gender inequality in sexual relationships affects condom use negotiations, which is further compounded by the patriarchal culture to have more than one partner. In a study carried out by UN Women, Jamaica AIDS Support for Life and the European Commission it was stated that violence against women and girls, including rape, incest, violence related to commercial sexual exploitation and economic exploitation as well as other forms of sexual violence, increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Girls between the ages of 13 and 19 are listed among the groups of persons who are most at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This is not solely due to the fact that more teenagers are involved in sexual intercourse, but because of their vulnerability. In the 2008 National HIV/STI Programme KAPB study it was noted that the proliferation of transactional sex among young girls places them at greater risk for infection.

Two of the twenty-three HIV-positive women who participated in the UN Women/JASL/ EC study admitted that they were infected after being raped and several others reported abuse from relatives and members of their community. In many cases women believe they deserved this kind of treatment because they have brought shame to their family. This, therefore discourages persons from getting tested and/or disclosing their status. Family members of infected women may also be shunned, which continues the cycle of despondency.

November 25 each year is dedicated to highlighting social injustices against women worldwide. According to a PAHO 2012 report violence against women has been recognized as a public health problem, a violation of human rights, and a barrier to economic development, thus the importance of *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*. The **Jamaica AIDS Support for Life** believes that empowering women can reduce HIV infection rates.