



News Release Communiqué

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NAMIBIAN LAWYER AND CANADIAN ACADEMIC HONOURED FOR HIV/AIDS WORK

Longtime Rights Defender and Researcher Receive 2009 Awards

TORONTO, June 12, 2009 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch today will honour **Michaela Clayton**, a Namibian lawyer and activist, as the recipient of the 2009 International Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. The 2009 Canadian Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights will be presented to **Viviane Namaste**, an associate professor at Concordia University whose research and activism consider communities of people invisible in HIV/AIDS prevention and services, including bisexuals and transsexuals.

The awards, given annually since 2002, recognize outstanding individuals and organizations that protect the rights and dignity of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. This year's awards will be presented in Toronto at a public reception. The featured speaker is Justice Edwin Cameron, an openly HIV-positive judge of South Africa's highest court and a leading global advocate for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. The reception kicks off the Legal Network's Symposium on HIV, Law and Human Rights (www.aidslaw.ca/symposium).

About Michaela Clayton

The International Award recognizes Clayton's passionate and unflagging commitment for more than 15 years to protecting the rights of people living with HIV. Among other contributions, she was the founding director of the AIDS Legal Unit at the Legal Assistance Centre in Namibia, the first public interest legal organization in the country. At the Legal Assistance Center, Clayton was counsel in successful litigation challenging the Namibian military's testing and exclusion of HIV-positive recruits, and worked closely with the Namibian government and public interest groups to develop the Namibian HIV/AIDS Charter of Rights and the country's National AIDS Policy.

In 2002, she co-founded the AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), a regional network of 35 organizations working in partnership across southern Africa to defend and promote human rights in the response to HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

"Clayton's work has changed the public discussion about HIV in the region, continuously challenging stigma and discrimination," said Joe Amon, director of the Health and Human Rights Division at Human Rights Watch. "As ARASA's director, she has worked tirelessly to build grassroots organizations throughout southern Africa, training activists in every country in the region."

Clayton has led ARASA's advocacy aimed at reversing the trend towards harmful "AIDS laws" in the region, highlighting the dangers of provisions that violate privacy and expand the criminalization of HIV transmission very broadly.

"Clayton's vision and perseverance have been central to the emergence of a human rights movement related to HIV in southern Africa," said Richard Elliott, executive director of the Legal Network. "A devoted human rights activist, she is committed not only to protecting the rights of those who are HIV positive, but to defending the rights of all those who are marginalized or vulnerable."

Clayton said: "I'm honoured to accept this Award, because it helps highlight the work of so many advocates supported by ARASA. To achieve universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, we must emphasize the respect and protection of human rights. There is no other way."

About Viviane Namaste

The 2009 Canadian Award honours the years-long HIV-prevention work by Viviane Namaste. In 1995, she co-founded ASTT(e)Q, Action Santé: Travesti(e)s et Transsexuel(le)s du Québec, and subsequently coordinated this HIV project for several years. She also set up one of the first HIV prevention organizations in Canada by and for trans sex workers.

Namaste holds the Research Chair in HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health and is an Associate Professor at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University in Montréal. She has conducted extensive research in Québec and Ontario on the HIV prevention and service needs of transsexuals. She is currently conducting research on the HIV prevention needs of bisexual men and women (see www.polyvalence.ca). Like her work on transsexuals, this project seeks to examine gaps in HIV prevention and research, with an aim to developing innovative solutions that connect knowledge and action.

"Namaste's extensive research has highlighted the HIV prevention and service needs of transsexuals, a community often ignored in HIV/AIDS services, prevention campaigns and policy initiatives," Elliott said

Jenn Clamen, a community activist and organizer in Montréal who nominated Namaste for the award, said that "her research has been instrumental in securing funding for community-based health services for transsexuals in Montréal, and has been particularly crucial for the most marginalized transgender people. She has been a leader and an inspiration in her community."

Namaste said: "I am honoured to receive this award, so that more attention is given to the health needs of transgender people. The empirical research available provides compelling evidence that both bisexuals and transsexuals are tremendously affected by HIV/AIDS – in many cases, even more so than other populations recognized in Canadian HIV/AIDS policy – but face additional barriers to appropriate and respectful health services. This award provides an occasion to highlight the significant gaps that still exist in our knowledge of HIV/AIDS and the communities affected, to move from knowledge to action."

Namaste has served as an expert witness in a number of immigration cases and in a constitutional challenge to the Ontario government's decision to stop covering sex

reassignment surgery under the provincial health insurance plan. She has also published several academic books on transsexuals and health, with a particular focus on questions of HIV, including *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, which won the 2001 Outstanding Book Award of the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Bigotry and Human Rights.

About the Awards

The Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights were established in 2002 by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch. An award is presented annually to one Canadian and one international recipient. Past recipients can be seen online at www.aidslaw.ca/awards.

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) promotes the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada's leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org) is an independent, nongovernmental organization that conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in 80 countries around the world. Human Rights Watch addresses the human rights practices of governments of all political stripes, of all geopolitical alignments, and of all ethnic and religious persuasions. It defends freedom of thought and expression, due process and equal protection of the law, and a vigorous civil society; it documents and denounces abuses of internationally recognized human rights. Its goal is to hold governments accountable if they transgress the rights of their people. Human Rights Watch began in 1978, and maintains offices in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, London, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Tashkent, and Johannesburg.

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Awards Ceremony Details:

Friday, June 12, 2009

6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Notes: The last hour is a Cocktail Reception. Also, following the Awards presentation, Justice Edwin Cameron of the Constitutional Court of South Africa will present a public lecture on "Criminalization of HIV Transmission and Human Rights"

Osgoode Hall
130 Queen St. West, Toronto

For further information, including detailed biographies and interviews with the Award recipients:

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