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Remarks By

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**The White House
Washington, D.C.**

to

Eleventh International Conference on AIDS

Symposium on Microbicides

July 8, 1996

Good evening:

First I would like to lay out ten facts about women and HIV transmission.

- 1. At least 75% of all HIV infections worldwide result from unprotected heterosexual sex.**
- 2. In the U.S. a woman is battered every 9 seconds and many of these incidents involve rape. I am sure that similar data would apply to many other countries.**
- 3. Many women are sexually monogamous but have partners who are not.**
- 4. Many women cannot insist on or negotiate condom use by their male partners because of the fear of violence or rejection.**
- 5. Of the 28 million people infected worldwide, almost half are women.**

- 6. Women are much more ~~as~~ vulnerable to HIV infection than men.**
- 7. The only female-controlled prevention method is the female condom, which has not accepted by many women and many men.**
- 8. While it is imperative to ask women - and men- to abstain from sex, delay sex, be mutually monogamous or use a male condom, in fact, these are essential prevention messages, we must also recognize that in many cultures in both developed and developing countries these prevention methods are unrealistic for millions of women.**
- 9. Currently, safe sex is not compatible with pregnancy. Women around the world who would like to practice safe sex are putting themselves at risk so they can have a child.**
- 10. We now know that the risk of infection with HIV - or of infecting others - is magnified by the presence of STDs; and that**

controlling STDS can lead to a significant reduction in HIV transmission.

For the last 10 years, researchers have spent hundreds of millions of dollars looking for a vaccine to prevent infection. This is vital research and it must continue with even more support.

But at the same time we need to focus more energy, more brain power and more funds, than we currently are, on female-controlled methods of prevention, including the female condom, especially now that there are promising opportunities lying ahead of us.

Because of all the facts I have mentioned it is clear to me that we have an absolute imperative to move forward in the development of a microbicide that a woman can use privately if she wishes - one that is safe and effective against HIV and also against other STDS that are cofactors in HIV transmission.

There is an urgent need for such a product, and once it is developed we must find a way to make it available to sexually active females in all countries of the world.

I don't mean to imply that there are not difficult challenges facing us. There are many questions yet unanswered regarding the ecology of the vagina, the transmissibility of viral particles in semen and vaginal secretions and how to prevent unacceptable inflammation while providing protection. Once we have a safe and effective microbicide there are issues that will remain to be resolved such as liability, access and availability. But there are several biotech and other pharmaceutical companies that have made exciting progress and we need to foster and encourage them.

The collaboration between federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, and Prevention, the drug industry, and international organizations such as UNAIDS, is essential in the development of microbicides. In the U.S., research is being supported at higher funding levels each year and Vice President Gore has met with drug company representatives to

ask them to increase their efforts on microbicide research. Tomorrow Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala will have an announcement regarding microbicides at the Plenary Session.

As we can all agree we must protect the most vulnerable among us. There is no question that in most societies women are among the most vulnerable.

The theme of this conference and of World AIDS Day is “One World - One Hope.” It is in this spirit of partnership and unity in the face of this tragic period of world history that can lead us from the darkness into the light.

As we will hear this evening from the remarkable scientists who are leading us toward the light, enormous progress has been made. I am grateful to you who toil in the labs and in the field and I urge you to continue to work hard to achieve our goal of protecting women and men from sickness and death.

Thank you.