



For immediate release

NEW YORK STUDENTS UNITE TO CALL FOR AIDS RELIEF FOR RWANDAN GENOCIDE SURVIVORS

(NEW YORK) Students from across New York united in Washington Square Park to read the testimonies of Rwandan survivors to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide and to call on the Office of the US Global AIDS Coordinator to recognize HIV+ survivors in Rwanda as an at-risk population eligible for priority to antiretroviral treatment.

Students from New York University, Columbia University, Yeshiva University, along with local high schools, each read one of 100 testimonies of young survivors, many of whom were girls raped and infected with HIV and AIDS during the genocide, in The Reading of the Testimonies NYC. It is estimated that almost 5,000 people passed through the square during the four-hour event, which served to reach a wider public to inform and educate more people about the genocide.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) currently recognizes prisoners but not survivors as an at-risk population for priority for antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. Despite the fact that many survivors are HIV+ today due to a systematic program of rape and deliberate infection during the genocide, many are denied access to the treatment available to the men that raped them. The campaign launched at The Reading of the Testimonies NYC calls on the Office of the US Global AIDS Coordinator, which sets the policy of PEPFAR, to recognize the plight of survivors and to ensure that they are given equal access to HIV and AIDS counselling, testing and treatment.

The testimonies, which were read consecutively from 10am to 2pm, were supplemented by talks from New York based survivors including Jacqueline Murekatete and Marie-Claudine Mukamabano, as well as Rwandans working to support survivors including Mary Kayitesi Blewitt and Gasana Mutesi. All spoke on the importance of commemorating the genocide and the

importance of the event in New York in demonstrating solidarity and support for the cause of the survivors.

Mary Kayitesi Blewitt OBE, Founder of SURF, who lead the event commented:

“Last month, a conference was convened in Canada by genocide revisionists questioning, downplaying and even denying the genocide – reinforcing the importance of today’s act of remembrance. The Reading of the Testimonies NYC not only serves to remember the victims, but by giving a voice to survivors also serves as a call on the Office of the US Global AIDS Coordinator to recognize HIV+ survivors as an at-risk population for antiretroviral treatment. With the Reading of the Testimonies NYC, we ask that the right of HIV+ survivors for equal access to antiretroviral treatment is recognized in the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.”

She added:

“There is no simple way of enacting justice, but by securing access to AIDS Relief then at least women survivors can look forward again to a future. The support that New York students demonstrated today to remember the victims of the genocide, and to support the survivors call for AIDS Relief, is another step towards securing justice for survivors.”

The event was the first outdoor event to be held in New York commemorating the genocide. The event was staged in association with an array of organizations working to support survivors in New York, including Jacqueline’s Human Rights Corner, Kuki Ndiho, Foundation Rwanda, Voices of Rwanda, Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, Amani Africa, Orphans of Rwanda, Wagner Student Alliance for Africa and Wagner International Public Service Association.

- END -

For further information, please contact:

David Russell – 718 200 6076

Hope Tumukunde - ht504@nyu.edu

New York University