

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**IAS CALLS FOR STRONGER SUPPORT AND PROTECTION FOR HIV  
PROFESSIONALS**

**7 May 2010 (Geneva, Switzerland)** – The International AIDS Society (IAS), the world’s leading association of professionals working in the global response to AIDS, notes with alarm the imprisonment of Maxim Popov, sentenced to 7 years jail, primarily for the promotion of HIV prevention efforts. The IAS calls for the immediate release of Popov and urges foundations and donors to ensure better protections for HIV professionals working in environments hostile to effective responses to HIV and AIDS.

Mr Popov has been jailed for attempting to address his country’s growing HIV epidemic with effective, evidence based approaches. Popov, 28, is the author of “HIV and AIDS Today,” a brochure that discusses the use of condoms in HIV prevention, the need for sterile needles for injecting drug users, and education on HIV prevention within same-sex relations. In his training workshops with school teachers, Popov, used a text-book “Healthy Lifestyles, The Guidance for Teachers,” published in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan with support of USAID and UNDP, which advises using condoms to protect oneself from HIV.

The Uzbek government said that the book constituted an “assault on minors without violence” and ordered the book incinerated and barred from circulation. Izis, the AIDS NGO founded by Popov, with support from a wide array of donors including USAID and DfID, has shut down since his jailing.

“Imprisoning Maxim Popov is not only a violation of human rights, but it has hurt public health efforts in Uzbekistan,” said Robin Gorna, Executive Director of the IAS. “In most countries around the world the work done by Maxim Popov would be drawing praise and support. It highlights the need for donors, like those who funded Mr. Popov’s work, to improve protection of their frontline HIV educators from harassment and arrest.”

According to UNAIDS, Uzbekistan has one of the world’s fastest-rising HIV infection rates. About 16,000 cases of HIV were reported in 2009 — more than an eleven-fold increase from 1,400 cases in 2001.

Uzbekistan is one of the countries that will receive attention at AIDS 2010, the International AIDS conference convened by the IAS in Vienna 18-23 July 2010. AIDS 2010 has a focus on “Rights Here, Right Now”, in part to address the rapidly expanding epidemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia which are fuelled by the lack of attention to human rights.

“I urge all influential political and public health leaders to join IAS in calling for Maxim Popov’s release from prison,” said IAS President Julio Montaner. “Countries will never fully address their HIV epidemic unless their citizens have open access to information and evidence-based interventions. Governments, donors and funders must recognize that assuring the safety, legal protection and support of those implementing evidence-based programs is essential to ensuring that programs are effective and deliver value to the citizens of both recipient and donor

countries. Committed professionals such as Maxim Popov should never be subject to the kind of treatment he has received, merely for acting in the public interest of his fellow citizens and for implementing proven, effective interventions to prevent HIV.”

End

**About the IAS:**

The International AIDS Society (IAS) is the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals, with 14,000 members from 190 countries working at all levels of the global response to AIDS. Our members include researchers from all disciplines, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the frontlines of the epidemic, as well as policy and programme planners. The IAS is the custodian of the biennial International AIDS Conference, which will be held in Vienna, Austria from 18 to 23 July 2010.

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