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4 August 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

We write to congratulate you for supporting Canada to host the Fifth Replenishment Conference of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria in Montreal, Quebec on September 16, 2016. The Global Fund plays a crucial role in tackling three devastating epidemics that, as you have said, "have tragic and far-reaching impacts on the world's most vulnerable people."

As the host nation, Canada has a unique opportunity to begin a dialogue with the other global health leaders about including the human papillomavirus (HPV) as one of the devastating epidemics to be addressed by the Global Fund.

Cervical cancer and pre-cancers related to HPV infection, treated or not, can lead to maternal mortality, infertility, premature delivery and increased risk of HIV acquisition. The economic impact on low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) is massive as 75% of the production in some LMIC is the result of women's work. Half a million women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year and, by 2030, 98% of these cancers will be diagnosed in LMIC where treatment and palliative care too frequently are not available.

This is a burden that could be prevented if women in LMIC could access cervical cancer screening and vaccines. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported the adaptation to LMIC of an effective test to identify and treat women who are infected with high-risk HPV. Unfortunately, access to this test in LMIC is very limited.

There are, however, safe and effective vaccines that can prevent most HPV-related conditions if given to young girls. Properly administered, HPV vaccines can prevent up to 90% of cervical cancers that are found most commonly in LMIC. These vaccines can also prevent more than 90% of HPV-related cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, mouth and pharynx and anus.

The use of these two preventive technologies has the potential to positively impact on the health (and the wealth) of LMIC as recognized in the report of the 2011 United Nations' High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases as well as in the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030.

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The inclusion of activities to prevent HPV infections in the mandate of the Global Fund would be important and relevant for a number of reasons:

- The Global Fund has a particular focus on the rights of women and girls who suffer the most from cancers that can be prevented by the HPV vaccine and the screening of pre-cancerous lesions;
- HPV infections that result in genital warts and/or lesions of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, oropharynx and anus increase the transmissibility of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;
- Treatment of HPV-related lesions of the cervix can lead to maternal and fetal complications; and
- Two incredibly effective preventive tools are available but not accessible to those that need it the most.

HPV was not considered at the inception of the Global Fund because the preventive techniques did not exist. By not including HPV in the mandate of the Global Fund now, women whose health and well-being have been safeguarded as a result of the successful strategy of reducing maternal mortality and the prevention of HIV transmission are falling victim to HPV-related diseases.

Canada has been a long-standing world leader in protecting the health of women and girls and in combatting the epidemics currently covered by the Global Fund. We therefore urge the Government of Canada to continue its leadership role and engage other global health leaders in a discussion about including the human papillomavirus in the mandate of the Global Fund.

In the words of Ian Frazer, inventor of the HPV vaccine, "No person should be denied access to an effective measure to prevent serious disease." Including HPV in the mandate of the Global Fund will enhance the current investment in women and girls and protect them from preventable cervical and other cancers.

Sincerely,

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cc Dr. Mark Dybul, Executive Director, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
Melinda Gates, Co-chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie
The Honorable Jane Philpott, Minister of Health