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For immediate release

## **LEGAL NETWORK CONDEMNS ANTI-GAY MOB ATTACK ON AWARD-WINNING JAMAICAN ACTIVIST**

**TORONTO, February 16, 2007** — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network condemned today the latest anti-gay hate crime in Jamaica against four men branded as homosexuals, including an internationally recognized human rights activist, and urged the Jamaican government to take immediate action.

On Wednesday, four men were holed up inside a pharmacy in Kingston, Jamaica, for almost an hour. Outside, an angry mob of hundreds demanded that pharmacy staff hand over the men. In addition to hurling homophobic insults, some of the mob called for the men to be killed. Police were forced to use tear gas to disperse the crowd in order to remove the men from the scene.

“This is the latest horror in a series of attacks against gays and lesbians in Jamaica,” said Joanne Csete, Executive Director of the Legal Network. “These terrible human rights abuses are unacceptable and undermine efforts to respond to the HIV epidemic in Jamaica by driving gay men underground and beyond the reach of education and health services.”

The Legal Network is also calling for an investigation into allegations of verbal and physical abuse by police. Gareth Williams, international recipient of the 2006 Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights (presented annually by the Legal Network and Human Rights Watch), reported that he and the three other men were accused by police of provoking the mob by being “battymen,” a derogatory term for gay men. Williams says he was also physically assaulted by police officers with guns and fists.

“We’re deeply disturbed to hear that police may have perpetrated further abuse towards those whom they were supposed to be protecting,” said Robert Carr, a Jamaican human rights advocate who sits on the Legal Network’s board of directors. “Jamaican authorities must ensure that the officers involved are held to account.”

Jamaican law criminalizes homosexuals. As documented in reports by Human Rights Watch, gays and lesbians in Jamaica face widespread discrimination and often deadly violence. In June 2004, Brian Williamson, a leading gay rights activist, was knifed to death in his apartment — later, a crowd gathered outside, laughing and singing and celebrating his murder. Days later, Victor Jarrett was stabbed and stoned to death by a mob in Montego Bay, with reports alleging that police participated in the attack. In November 2005, activist Steve Harvey was abducted from his Kingston home and murdered.

“The homophobia that leads to such incidents of brutality is unacceptable,” concluded Carr. “The Jamaican government must condemn these kinds of incidents and take immediate action to eliminate such discrimination, including changing Jamaican law to respect and protect the human rights of all its citizens.”

### **About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network ([www.aidslaw.ca](http://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, ethical and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

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