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Contact: Circe J. Gray Le Compte, Director of Communications
National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) * 1931 13th Street NW, Ste. 200, Washington, DC 20009
Telephone: (202) 483-NMAC (6622) ext. 309; (202) 352-7240
Web: www.2008USCA.org * E-mail: communications@nmac.org

Letter from Paul A. Kawata, Executive Director of the National Minority AIDS Council, Sponsor of the United States Conference on AIDS

August 31, 2008 ~ Washington, DC

Dear Residents of Ft. Lauderdale:

We at the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) are so excited to be holding our 12th annual United States Conference on AIDS (USCA) this September 18-21 in your beautiful city. We moved the conference to the Greater Broward/Ft. Lauderdale Convention Center in Ft. Lauderdale after our original venue in Miami informed us in August that it would not open in time for our meeting.

I just celebrated 19 years as Executive Director at NMAC, which gives you a lot of perspective when it comes to challenges like this. While I never doubted that we could overcome this obstacle, my hat is off to the Ft. Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Greater Ft. Lauderdale/Broward Convention Center, NMAC staff and USCA Miami Host Committee members. They took this year's conference theme, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," to heart, seamlessly transitioning USCA and its 4,000 participants from Miami to Ft. Lauderdale in less than four weeks! Without their incredible know-how and dedication, we wouldn't be holding USCA at all – a meeting that has never been as important to the AIDS community than now.

USCA is not just any professional health care meeting. It is the largest annual AIDS-related meeting in the United States, bringing together HIV/AIDS professionals working on the frontlines of the HIV/AIDS epidemic throughout the nation, its territories and Native American reservations together to learn new skills and build partnerships. The information they take home will enable them to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively, and help improve – and save – countless lives. Indeed, we estimate that information shared among our participants probably touches the lives of over 100,000 people. NMAC also leverages USCA to help raise awareness about the continued impact of HIV/AIDS domestically – especially in a time when many so many people think AIDS is "something happening somewhere else."

That idea couldn't be farther from the truth – or more deadly to the health of this nation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently announced that HIV incidence rates are approximately 40% higher than previously thought, with 56,300 – not 40,000 – new HIV infections occurring in 2006 alone. Even more alarming is the disproportionate impact of AIDS continues to have on communities of color. Of these new infections, African Americans accounted for nearly half, at 45%, followed by Latinos at 17%. Native Americans and Asian and Pacific Islanders reported alarming increases in overall HIV incidence.

The state of Florida has been heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS, and was second only to New York in the number of HIV cases reported in 2006. It ranked third, after New York and California, in the number of cumulative AIDS cases that year. Men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to bear the largest share of AIDS cases in the U.S. – and Florida. In Miami-Dade County alone, approximately 1 in 6 MSM are living with HIV. And with a large retirement and senior citizen community, Florida also faces the challenge of the increasing number of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in people 50 and older. But education is the key to stopping AIDS in its tracks, and I hope you will join us in the struggle to make AIDS history. To learn what you can do, visit us online at www.nmac.org, or become a friend of the National Minority AIDS Council on Facebook! And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us directly at (202) 483-NMAC (6622) or info@nmac.org.

Yours in the Struggle,



Paul A. Kawata

About USCA

The 2008 United States Conference on AIDS (USCA) will take place September 18-21, in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, at Greater Ft. Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center. Since 1997, USCA, the largest annual HIV/AIDS meeting in the United States, has strengthened the domestic community-based response to HIV/AIDS by bringing together professionals from across the country to learn new skills and build partnerships and collaborations.

The conference's extensive selection of over 200 institutes, seminars, workshops and roundtables sessions addressing every aspect of the AIDS epidemic – from nutrition and treatment to prevention and international issues – enables participants to customize their training and networking experiences according to their unique professional needs. To learn more about USCA, visit: www.2008USCA.org; call: (202) 483-NMAC (6622); or e-mail: conferences@nmac.org.

About USCA's Sponsor, NMAC

The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) has developed leadership within communities of color to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS since 1987. NMAC has furthered this mission by providing a public policy education program; national and regional trainings and conferences; treatment and research programs and trainings; numerous publications; and a website: www.nmac.org. The agency also serves an association of AIDS service organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, hospitals, clinics, health departments and other groups assisting people and families. NMAC's advocacy efforts are funded through private funders and donors only. For more information, contact NMAC directly at (202) 483-NMAC (6622) or visit: www.nmac.org.

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