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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**2002 MARCH 22ND**

**PRESS RELEASE ON HIV TESTING PREGNANCY : THE NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE VOLUNTARY TESTING**

Would compulsory testing for Hiv during pregnancy prevent some children from being born with Hiv infection ?

In a statement approved unanimously on March 14th 2002, on HIV testing during pregnancy and the prevention of perinatal HIV transmission to the child, the National AIDS Council once again advocates voluntary and informed testing. The Council completes its statement with recommendations designed to improve the overall efficiency of prevention, now that treatments enable drastic decreases in mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The current noncoercive policy, which includes routinely offered HIV tests at initial prenatal medical visits, is efficient because it is massively accepted. Compulsory testing would jeopardize the patient-to-physician relationship, based on trust, information and advice, which is established when the test is offered. Moreover, compulsory testing<sup>1</sup> would in no way guarantee treatment acceptance.

The Council considers that cases of HIV transmission by mothers whose infection was not diagnosed are due to insufficient prenatal care or to mothers' infection during pregnancy.

To reduce risks of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, the National AIDS Council particularly recommends :

- that health and welfare care settings for pregnant women provide information on the benefits of HIV testing ;
- that prevention counselling be repeated throughout pregnancy ;
- that the public Authorities change the current Law<sup>2</sup> by including two new test offers, one at the 6th month of pregnancy, another at the final prenatal visit ;

that clinicians' awareness of breast-feeding risks in HIV positive women be raised.

The National AIDS Council hereby reaffirms its strong stand on voluntary and informed consent of the individual to testing

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<sup>1</sup> A stand previously adopted in the Report followed by a statement on routine or compulsory HIV testing, December 1991.

<sup>2</sup>