NEWS RELEASE:

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Thousands of people around the world to come together to keep the light on HIV on Sunday 18 May

This Sunday 18 May 2014, people around the world will host local community events to mark the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial. This annual mobilization campaign has been taking place every year since 1983, led by coalition of community organisations globally, and coordinated by the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+). The theme of this year’s event will be ‘Let’s keep the light on HIV’.

With the Candlelight Memorial falling just two months before the 2014 International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Australia, the theme echoes the AIDS 2014 tagline, Stepping up the Pace, which reflects that the response has already been effective, but that it will only continue to be effective if support continues and grows.

Suzette Moses-Burton, Executive Director of GNP+, says, “Sunday 18th May will be the thirty first year of the Candlelight Memorial, a leading example of global community-led activism around the issue of HIV and AIDS. During that time, we have seen extraordinary advances in how this disease is recognized and treated. This change has only been able to come about through the incredible activism lead by the movement of people living with HIV. The Candlelight Memorial is about recognizing those who have campaigned for the rights of people living with HIV, as well as remembering those who have fallen along the way.”

Whilst enormous gains have been made in improving the lives of people living with HIV, there are still many barriers to be overcome, even in the richest countries. Ms. Moses-Burton says, “For many, access to treatment, care and support is challenging at best, and in some cases, it is impossible for people to access these services. This is exacerbated by stigma, particularly for key populations living with HIV, who may also be criminalized. Whilst we have come a long way, there is still a lot more work to do.”

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is dependent on the support and enthusiasm of community mobilisers large and small around the world. Coordinating organisations are diverse, and include networks of people living with HIV and other key populations, affected families and communities, as well as women’s organisations, service organisations, academic institutions, healthcare facilities, faith-based groups, businesses, media and more. The type of events held may vary enormously, from small community vigils to multi-day national commemorations, and many use the opportunity to promote local HIV services, encourage education and community dialogue, and advocate for the advancement of public policy.
The theme reflects the urgent need to ensure that HIV and AIDS don’t drop off the agenda for international policy makers. Ms. Moses-Burton says: “The post-2015 agenda is looming, and we face a future where funding for these issues will be sharply cut, just at a time when we have a much better idea of what approaches are effective. With 33 million people living with HIV today, this is an issue that can’t just fade away – we need to keep the light on HIV.”

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For more information about the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, please visit http://www.candlelightmemorial.org/.

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About the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+):

www.gnpplus.net

GNP+ is the Global Network for and by People Living with HIV. As the only global network working with all PLHIV regardless of how they choose to network, GNP+ works with independent and autonomous regional and national networks of PLHIV in all regions as well as networks that include PLHIV, including key population and treatment access networks.

GNP+’s mission is to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV. The network’s vision is a powerful and united worldwide social movement of people living with HIV, with their leadership and voices at the centre of the HIV response. GNP+’s core activities fall under three pillars: advocacy (including activism, campaigns and policy dialogue), information and knowledge management, and network and community strengthening.