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Symposium on Children and HIV/AIDS Sets the Stage for International AIDS Conference in Mexico City

Richmond, Va – July 29, 2008 – Two youth sponsored by Christian Children's Fund will speak at the International Symposium - *Children and HIV/AIDS; Action Now, Action How*, Aug. 1-2, in Mexico City.

Carmen Elena Portillo of Honduras and Juan Garcia Bonilla of Mexico have each served as youth advocates in community led HIV/AIDS programs where they live.

“We have only seen the tip of the iceberg concerning the impact of HIV and AIDS on children,” said William Fleming, HIV/AIDS specialist for CCF. Fleming will speak at the symposium and moderate the panel at which Portillo and Bonilla will speak.

Fleming noted that CCF youth groups in Honduras and Mexico are engaged in community level advocacy to improve the lives of children, promote safer and healthier communities and reduce HIV/AIDS related stigmas.

Most recent global statistics show that young people ages 15 to 24 accounted for 40 percent of new HIV infections and that more than 15.2 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. The number of orphans created by the disease is expected to increase globally through 2025, representing a second wave of the epidemic.

“As parents grow ill and die, millions more children will fall into poverty. Our response must be comprehensive, coordinated, well-resourced and long-term,” said Fleming. “There is no quick fix for this challenge.”

CCF is working with youth globally as key partners in the response to the AIDS epidemic. In addition to the youth advocacy work being cited by CCF youth at the HIV/AIDS symposium, CCF is working with youth in Africa as well. In Kenya, youth tutors provide support and mentorship to vulnerable children struggling to stay in school while coping with loss and illness at home.

Youth in Zambia are managing an Internet café that provides information on AIDS and sexually transmitted infections as well as referrals to youth friendly services. Networks of youth centers in Uganda implement action plans that include AIDS prevention and economic development activities.

The two-day symposium on Children and HIV/AIDS addresses issues related to children and youth affected by AIDS and how to improve national responses at all levels of society. The discussions held here will resonate in the subsequent XVII International AIDS Conference, Aug. 3-8 immediately following the symposium.

Christian Children's Fund (CCF) is a global force for children, helping the world's poorest and most vulnerable survive and thrive in order to reach their full potential. One of the world's oldest and most respected international child development organizations, CCF works in 31 countries and assists approximately 13.2 million children and family members worldwide, regardless of race, creed or origin.

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