Collaborative Statement from Women's Health Advocates
WHO and Partners Stakeholders' Meeting on Hormonal Contraception and HIV

Geneva, January 31, 2012

As women's health advocates and representatives of the women and HIV community, including women living with HIV, we seek your leadership to ensure that the upcoming WHO and Partners Stakeholders' Meeting on Hormonal Contraception and HIV recognizes the critical importance of expanding women's sexual and reproductive health choices through ensuring access to essential family planning services; championing existing technologies such as the male and female condom; investing in new reproductive and women-centered HIV prevention technologies, including possible new barrier methods such as the cervical cap; and promoting the rights of women everywhere.

Whilst we acknowledge this observational evidence, it is crucial that women are not left without alternative acceptable methods for contraception should recommendations be made to withdraw Depo-Provera from communities. Women should not become more vulnerable in the name of advancing science. The recent questions about the relationship between hormonal contraception and HIV transmission should not be seen or treated as a zero-sum game in which women lose out in either instance, but instead as an opportunity to advance human rights, science and public health.

As global advocates, we recognise the diversity of perspectives at hand and fully endorse the recommendations made by last week's African women's consultation in Kampala convened by ICW East Africa and AVAC. Building from these, we echo six key actions for moving forward in a time where millions of women's lives are at stake:

1. Meaningfully include and consult women in all our diversity, including young women and women living with HIV

2. Scale up existing women-centered and controlled barrier methods such as the female condom which work for women living with HIV and at risk of HIV

3. Promote information and full disclosure of possible associated risks to women, while providing real, practical and accessible alternatives to hormonal contraception

4. Rather than invest resources in further randomized control trials, focus research resources "to activities that denote real <u>progress</u> in bringing new, paradigm-changing, multipurpose technologies to women" (Gollub, Stein 2012) such as invisible and long-lasting barrier methods and avoid the ethical pitfalls which more research on the possible HIV risk associated with hormonal contraception would present

5. Work to expand women's sexual and reproductive choices to fill the massive unmet need for prevention of unplanned pregnancies, HIV, STI's and perinatal HIV transmission

6. Invest in women-friendly implementation as a primary concern for all the options