



**For Immediate Release
November 2, 2006**

Media Contact: Geoffrey Knox: 917-414-1749
Mona Finston: 212-724-6117; Sondra Segal: 646-266-8540

Two Former Surgeons General—Drs. Satcher and Elders—Say New Approach Needed to Address Sexual Health Crisis in America

Dr. David Satcher announces new Center of Excellence for Sexual Health to focus on increasing health disparities among African-Americans and other minorities

(*San Francisco, November 2*) Two former U.S. Surgeons General told a gathering of leading sexuality researchers and advocates in San Francisco today that a new approach is needed to address the current sexual health crisis in America. Dr. David Satcher and fellow former Surgeon General Dr. Jocelyn Elders called for more aggressive action by the public and private sectors in response to distressing disparities in sexual health among African Americans and other minorities. While highlighting distressing statistics on increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections among minorities and youth, they also said sexual health must be viewed not only as the absence of disease but as a positive dimension of human development and well being. As part of this new approach, Dr. Satcher announced that he is establishing a first-of-its kind Center of Excellence for Sexual Health at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta to develop innovative public health leadership in this area.

“This new Center of Excellence will be a national resource for public health education in sexual health, particularly for minority communities and medical institutions,” said Dr. Satcher, director of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute and the former 16th Surgeon General of the United States. “We have high hopes and expectations for our work at the Center, but improving America’s sexual health is a challenge that must be met in homes, classrooms, legislatures, medical institutions, religious institutions and media outlets across the country. The Center will allow for a significant expansion of my work over the past five years to bring the right and left together on human sexuality and reduce the polarization that has led to the current state of affairs. Sexual health and literacy are challenges and a shared responsibility for all of us, challenges and responsibilities that we must work together to meet now.”

Dr. Satcher’s announcement came at a special meeting to mark the five-year anniversary of the former Surgeon General’s *Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*. Co-sponsors of the meeting, the National Sexuality Resource Center (NSRC) and the Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality (CRGS), presented their first annual *Champions of Sexual Literacy Awards*.

“Sexual literacy is the knowledge each of us needs to promote and protect sexual wellness and rights—for ourselves and for others,” said Gilbert Herdt, Ph.D., director of NSRC, which is based out of San Francisco State University (SFSU). “The higher a nation’s sexual literacy rate, the more likely that its citizens enjoy safe, healthy, consensual sexual relationships. The lower that rate, the greater the probability of sexual violence and the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. That’s what we’re seeing in the US today.”

Joycelyn Elders, M.D., who was forced to resign as the 15th US Surgeon General of the United States because of her comments about sexuality, also spoke at the meeting. She said:

Speaking honestly and openly about sexuality is not always valued in our society. I know from experience. And yet, I do not remain quiet because the time for silence is long over. We are not a nation in a good state of sexual health. Very little effort is being made, certainly not by the current government in Washington, to increase sexual literacy. Parents overwhelmingly want comprehensive sexuality education for their children. It's the politicians who are the slow learners. The negative impact of continued silence is unacceptably high, growing rates of STDs as well as unintended pregnancy, especially among African Americans and other minorities. As Dr. Satcher has said, we need a national dialogue on sexuality, and we need it now.

Dr. Elders cited current statistics from the Centers for Disease Control that show the following:

- 19 million new sexually transmitted infections annually, almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24, with an increasing number among men who have sex with men engaging in sexual behaviors that place them at risk for STDs and HIV infection
- 40,000 new cases of HIV infection each year, with rising rates for African Americans
- Nearly half of pregnancies are unintended, with the rate substantially higher among women aged 18–24 as well as unmarried, low-income, and minority women.

To highlight how to advance sexual literacy and improve sexual health in America, NSRC and CRGS presented today their first Champions of Sexual Literacy Awards to individuals and organizations that have made exemplary and innovative efforts in specific areas in the field of sexuality. They included:

- *Outstanding Research in Sexuality* to Dr. Anke A. Ehrhardt for her contributions to sexuality research over three decades and her leadership at the HIV Center for Research and Behavioral Studies at Columbia University.
- *Excellence in Sexuality Education* to Dr. Bernard Goldstein for his pioneering work to establish sexuality studies at San Francisco State University three decades ago.
- *Courageous Pioneering of Radically Inclusive Theology* to Bishop Yvette Flunder for her ministry as Senior Pastor at the City of Refuge, United Church of Christ in San Francisco and her leadership at the Ark of Refuge in providing housing, services and education to people living with HIV/AIDS.
- *Organizational Excellence in Promoting Public Awareness of Sexuality* to thinkMTV for their program, Sexual Health, and for airing bold public service announcements, news reports, and specials to empower and educate young people about sexual health and decision making.
- *Individual Excellence in Promoting Public Awareness of Sexuality* to B.D. Wong, actor, author for his work on the TV series Law and Order: Sexual Victims Unit and Oz that has established unprecedented public awareness around sexual violence. Wong is also an SFSU alumni.

"The women and men who received the first annual Champions of Sexual Literacy Awards are as diverse as they are distinguished," said Deborah Tolman, Ed.D, and director of CRGS. "They demonstrate the myriad ways in which sexual literacy can be created and disseminated. Our awards are one of the many ways that we at the NSRC and CRGS maintain our commitment to Dr. Satcher's *Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*. Sexual literacy means acknowledging the importance of thinking and acting responsibly when it comes to sexuality. We are proud to join Drs. Satcher and Elders in taking the lead to improve Americans' well-being by enhancing sexual literacy."

The National Sexuality Resource Center gathers and disseminates the latest accurate information and research on sexual health, education, and rights. NSRC initiates constructive dialogues—both online and face-to-face—on sexuality to promote social justice and to improve the quality of life in the United States. <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu>

The Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality (CRGS) is an interdisciplinary community of San Francisco State University faculty, students, and staff dedicated to producing and sharing new and useful knowledge about sexuality and gender. CRGS is committed to developing innovative questions, methods, and theories to promote social justice and well-being and to diminish inequalities and violence stemming from racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, heterosexism, and other forms of prejudice. <http://crgs.sfsu.edu/>

The Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) is a historically black institution established to recruit and train minority and other students as physicians, biomedical scientists, and public healthcare professionals committed to the primary healthcare needs of the underserved. The Center of Excellence for Sexual Health at MSM seeks to strengthen public health through promotion of national public discussion of sexual health issues and to provide forums and assistance to leaders of divergent viewpoints in building agreements on intractable issues of public health policy regarding sexual health. <http://www.msm.edu/>

#