Columbia Receives $125 Million Grant to Fight AIDS in Africa

By Peter Kobel

The numbers are staggering: between 25 million and 28 million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 15 million have died so far on the continent from the disease. But while the light on such figures are sobering, Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health last month received a $125 million, five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that will help tremendously in the battle against AIDS in Africa. The grant, the single largest in Columbia’s history, will be used to provide comprehensive HIV/AIDS care and treatment in Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania.

“This CDC funding provides an extraordinary opportunity to save lives,” said Allan Rosenfield, dean of the Mailman School.

The grant, announced Feb. 23 by Randall Tobias, the U.S. global AIDS coordinator, is part of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and will fund the Multicountry Columbia Antiretroviral Program (MCAP). The new program will build on the Mailman School’s existing MCTC-Plus Initiative, funded by eight private foundations and USAID, which is currently treating HIV-infected adults and children at multiple sites in eight countries, seven of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

The goal of MCAP is to broaden the current enrollment of HIV-infected patients in MCTC-Plus, some 2,300, to 190,000 individuals over the next five years. The Mailman School leads a consortium of in-country institutions that will help implement MCAP, including the Eastern Cape Department of Health and University of Transkei, South Africa; Ministry of Health and Health Alliance International, Mozambique; Ministry of Health and Muhimbili National Hospital, Tanzania; Mos Teaching and Referral Hospital and Indiana University, Kenya; and Treatment and Care Center, and Mailman School Dean Allan Rosenfield, right, with Mwosa Sinkala, head of the Chelstone Clinic in Lusaka, Zambia.

Columbia Libraries Chosen to House the Human Rights Watch Archive

By Colin Morris

Human rights abuses around the world often happen under a cloak of darkness. Whether it’s the oppression of ethnic minorities or the persecution of dissenting writers or intellectuals, human rights violations take place more easily when governments believe no one is watching. But for 25 years, Human Rights Watch has been a light on such injustices, compelling mainstream media and world leaders to pay attention. Now, the documentation behind the group’s investigations, the Human Rights Watch Archive, is coming to Columbia.

Columbia University Libraries has been designated the depositary institution for the HRW Archive. “Columbia has a long-standing, expansive and diverse commitment to human rights, through the School of International and Public Affairs, the Law School, the Center for International Conflict Resolution, and the Center for the Study of Human Rights,” said James Neal, vice president for Information Services and University librarian.

“The HRW Archive will be used extensively in expanding our research and teaching mission in these and other areas of the university where human rights issues are a significant focus.”

The archive offers a unique, comprehensive view of human rights conditions in more than 70 nations around the world during the last two and a half decades, and provides a complete picture of the investigative, public education and lobbying activities of this world-renowned organization. It includes audio tapes, audiovisual materials, field notes, public relations documents, tape, film, still photographs and video—all of which amounts to approximately 2,000 linear feet of documentation. The archive will allow researchers to track individual cases, investigate organizational development, and follow case studies on everything from KGB projects to prison rape in the United States.

With some exceptions for security considerations, Columbia’s community and the public will have access to field notes, taped and transcribed interviews with alleged victims of human rights violations, video and audio tapes, and other materials documenting the organization’s activities since its founding in 1978 as Helsinki Watch.

“Human Rights Watch collection will not only provide extraordinary documentation about the history and current status of human rights around the world, but it will also show how human rights matters are investigated, documented, reported and addressed, thus providing a valuable teaching tool for Columbia students going into human rights careers,” said Neal.

In selecting Columbia University Libraries to administer the archive, Human Rights Watch, the largest U.S.-based human rights organization, acknowledged the scope and strength of Columbia’s existing human rights programs, many of which will draw on these new resources for teaching and research.

“We believe Columbia University has a profound commitment to teaching human rights and to keep an archive that records the efforts of dedicated human rights activists,” said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. “Columbia is going to be an outstanding home for the Human Rights Watch Archive.”

Jeon Ashton, director of Columbia’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library, with the assistance of curatorial staff, will administer the archive. Columbia is committed to hiring two additional full-time employees to organize and administer the massive collection.

“The Columbia Libraries have strong programs in preservation, thus making sure that the Human Rights Watch materials will be taken care of properly and conserved for future generations of scholars and students,” said Neal.

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