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For Immediate Release

## **AIDS and Human Rights Organizations Condemn the Firing of South African Deputy Health Minister**

*Windhoek, Namibia, 9 August 2007* - Today, the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), a network of over 20 AIDS and human rights organizations across Southern Africa, condemned the South African government for the dismissal of Deputy Health Minister Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge. "The dismissal is clearly a political reprisal for the Deputy Minister's outspokenness and truthfulness on South Africa's AIDS epidemic and other health issues, including infant mortality," said Michaela Clayton, ARASA's Director.

While ARASA understands President Mbeki has the right to appoint and dismiss his ministers, the signal he has sent to his own people and to people around the region is that AIDS denialism is alive and well in his administration. President Mbeki has justified Madlala-Routledge's dismissal based on a trip that she took to an AIDS vaccine meeting in Spain, for which he maintains the Deputy Minister never received proper presidential approval. In consultations with our South African partners, ARASA has concluded that the charges of misconduct against Madlala-Routledge are false and misleading and that she was carrying out the legitimate duties of her office; had indeed requested permission for the journey, and; that the granting of that permission should have been a formality, but was revoked arbitrarily and in an attempt to discredit the Deputy-Minister.

Madlala-Routledge's work had stood in profound contrast to that of South African Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, who since her return from medical leave, has continued to promote untested and unproven remedies for HIV/AIDS and has fought court orders to provide essential medical services to people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, Tshabalala-Msimang has ignored key issues delaying the implementation of South African National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS, including expediting the approval of key AIDS drugs, speeding the accreditation of ART sites, ensuring the timely revision of clinical guidelines on antiretroviral treatment and prevention of mother to child transmission, and addressing the emergence of multi-drug and extremely drug resistant tuberculosis across the country.

"President Mbeki has taken a wrong turn in the fight against AIDS just as we thought the country was turning the corner and making progress," said Luyanda Ngonyama, ARASA's Advocacy Coordinator, based in Johannesburg. ARASA calls on President Mbeki to re-instate Madlala-Routledge with immediate effect and urges South Africa, in both words and actions, to reaffirm the commitment it made to an evidence-based, rational approach to HIV/AIDS in its new National Strategic Plan earlier this year, as the lives of millions of South Africans hang in the balance.

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