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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TO: Political, Health and Religion Editors

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH RECEIVES 'INTERNATIONAL MEDAL OF PEACE' THAT COINCIDES WITH PEPFAR MILESTONE ON WORLD AIDS DAY:

Dr. Rick Warren Presents Award, Engages with President on U.S. HIV/AIDS Initiatives and Accomplishments at Home and Abroad During Saddleback Civil Forum on Global Health

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1, 2008 – President George W. Bush was honored on the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day today, with the “International Medal of PEACE” given by Dr. Rick Warren on behalf of the Global PEACE Coalition during the Saddleback Civil Forum on Global Health. The award, given in recognition of the President’s tireless efforts and unprecedented contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, came on the heels of the President’s announcement that his President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) had fulfilled its commitment to support treatment for 2 million people ahead of schedule.

“I insisted on measureable goals because I felt lives needed to be saved,” President Bush said, explaining the success of the program was accomplished, in part, by aligning authority and responsibility through partnership with local leadership on the ground. “When we got started, there were 50,000 people getting anti-retrovirals in all sub-Saharan Africa, and we set a goal of 2 million people by five years. Today, we are able to announce that we are over 2 million in less than five years.”

The Forum, held at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., provided an opportunity for Dr. Warren and his wife Kay to engage both President Bush and Mrs. Laura Bush in candid conversation regarding their inspiration for PEPFAR, which began in 2003, and the results it has achieved globally including saving lives, creating new partnerships, trusting in local leadership, encouraging behavior and reducing stigma.

“No man in history – no world leader – has ever done more for global health than President George W. Bush, and I think we need to recognize that,” said Pastor Warren. Prior to the Bush Administration, there was no concerted effort by the U.S. to fight HIV/AIDS and other global pandemics.

“They call what’s taking place in Africa, ‘the Lazarus effect’ – people given up for dead now realizing there is life,” President Bush said. “What the American people have to understand about this initiative is that it is in our national interest to help save lives. It is really good foreign policy; it is good national security policy – to deal with hope when we can find it. It is obviously in our economic interest to have a vibrant, growing group of consumers, but it’s also in our moral interest – we are better nation when we save lives.”

Referencing Warren’s comprehensive PEACE Plan, which aligns government with faith and business leaders to collaborate on solutions for global needs, President Bush stressed the important role of the faith community. “I believe that when people join organizations to love their neighbor, that is a powerful incentive for effectiveness on the ground,” he said. “Government is justice and love comes from a higher government, higher calling – from God. People from across America, motivated by faith, are already involved in the process, so why not bring some order and focus. That is a proper role of the government in this case, and it’s working.”

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Mrs. Bush and Mrs. Warren were invited to join the discussion after both men acknowledged that their spouses were catalysts behind their great interest in global health. Mrs. Bush shared stories of the people who touched her life on her three independent trips to Africa and experiences traveling the globe with her husband on behalf of PEPFAR and other initiatives with their daughters, Jenna and Barbara.

“Nothing makes a parent more proud than when their child becomes a contributor,” said President Bush. “I suspect that if people got to see what our girls got to see, they would want to help save lives, too. One of the real challenges is to make sure that American consciences are raised and people understand the plight of their fellow citizens.

“PEPFAR is a part of a comprehensive strategy to deal with AIDS both at home and abroad,” President Bush continued. “The intention of PEPFAR was never to pirate money away from a domestic program but the intention of PEPFAR is to build on what we have learned at home.”

One of the ways the Bushes plan to help Americans understand this is by continuing their work after leaving the White House, particularly through a new Freedom Institute in partnership with Southern Methodist University, the alma mater of Mrs. Bush. President and Mrs. Bush also discussed the importance of continued funding for PEPFAR – even in this difficult economy – because of its cascading effect on other great needs around the world. One focus was the link between HIV/AIDS and President Bush’s African Education Literacy program.

Prior to the awarding of the “International Medal of PEACE” at the conclusion of the program, video tributes to President Bush were shown from United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki Moon; former British Prime Minister Tony Blair; His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda; Bono, musical artist and humanitarian activist; philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates; and Dr. Michel Kazatchkine, executive director of The Global Fund.

After the award presentation, a special message from President-elect Barack Obama was shown, during which he congratulated President Bush for his accomplishments with HIV/AIDS and addressed the future of global health.

“This epidemic can’t be stopped by government alone, and money alone is not the answer either,” said President-elect Obama. “All of us must do our part...We as leaders must continue to sound that call and encourage others to see themselves as leaders in this fight – and we must reaffirm our own commitment to confront and defeat this disease once and for all.”

Pastor Warren concluded the Forum by emphasizing that though much has been done, there is a lot more to be done. “My challenge to you is, ‘What are you going to do?’ Warren said. “Will you say, ‘That was nice and that’s good, and I’m glad our country’s doing it.’ Or will you say, ‘I’m in.’ Because it’s not just a matter of a nice thing to do; it’s a matter of life or death. It’s a matter of the fact that when people are out hurting and we do nothing, our love vanishes and it’s all about that.”

The “International Medal of PEACE” is given to honor outstanding contribution toward alleviating the five “global goliaths” – giant problems negatively impacting society worldwide, including pandemic diseases, extreme poverty, illiteracy, corruption and injustice and spiritual emptiness. This was the first award given by the PEACE Coalition, which is a network of churches, businesses and individuals to solve humanitarian issues through the PEACE Plan, an effort to mobilize millions of Christians to Promote reconciliation, Equip servant leaders, Assist the poor, Care for the sick and Educate the next generation.

Founded in 1980 by the Warrens, Saddleback Church is located in Lake Forest, Calif. With an average weekly attendance of 22,000, it is one of the largest churches in America. For additional information about the Saddleback HIV/AIDS Initiatives, visit www.HIVandTheChurch.com or www.RwandaHealthcare.com.