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PRESS RELEASE

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PREVENTION

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PRESS RELEASE REGARDING A PUBLIC DEBATE ON
THE APPROPRIATENESS OF REOPENING THE
"MAISONS CLOSES", OR BROTHELS, AS A MEANS OF
COMBATING THE SPREAD OF THE DISEASE

The National AIDS Council has followed with close attention the public debate on the possibility of reopening "maisons closes", or brothels, as a means of combating transmission of HIV, the cause of AIDS.

The National AIDS Council is already addressing, from the point of view of AIDS, the problems posed for society by prostitution, whether regular or occasional, health education for prostitutes and, especially, for their customers. The National AIDS Council will publish its conclusions on completion of its studies.

But the Council wishes as of now to go on record with the statement that success in preventing this sexually transmitted disease is dependent on efforts to inform and the acceptance of their responsibilities by individuals. The truth in fact runs counter to the proposal, since the effectiveness of prevention would be jeopardized by the illusory sense of security and the risks of deception to which measures based on segregation would inevitably lead.

Michèle Barzach, Deputy Mayor of Paris with responsibility for social affairs, announced at a press conference that the reopening of the "maison closes" would be a way of combating the spread of the HIV epidemic (Le Monde, June 9, 1990). Madam Barzach's proposal provoked a debate, as brief as it was intense, that received considerable media attention, and which now leads the National AIDS Council to feel it necessary to restate a few core principles.

Reviving as it does a questionable traditional current of thought on public health, one that is inevitably conducive to discriminatory attitudes, such a proposal wrongly focuses public attention on a segment of the population seen as particularly responsible for the transmission of HIV. Furthermore, if it were implemented, it would result in practice in individual public health registration, which would contravene the fundamental principles of medical ethics, notably that relating to confidentiality. Similarly, its application would breach the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others adopted by United Nations in 1949 and ratified by France in 1959.

Michèle Barzach has since recognized that her proposal was unwarranted (Le Gai-Pied, December 7, 1990 ; Le Monde, December 12, 1990).