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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **MOTHER TO MOTHER: LIVING WITH AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA** *Venice Arts to go to South Africa to work with Women Living with AIDS*

Venice Arts has conducted photography workshops in neighborhoods across the United States, but this time they are taking a 24 hour plane trip to Khayelitsha, an impoverished township of Cape Town, where they will teach a group of 15 HIV-infected mothers and children how to use cameras to tell their stories about living with AIDS, educating the public in the process. The women have expressed interest in sharing both their struggles and their joys in the hope that their photography will raise awareness and help erode the stigma of living with AIDS. Images to be collected may include home life—from the barest shacks to farm worker housing—their mother-to-mother support groups, an anticipated birth, and more.

This journey began a few years back when award-winning television producer and writer **Neal Baer**, and internationally renowned photographer **Jim Hubbard**, brainstormed about how to best use their talents and resources to raise awareness about a variety of health-related issues through photographic exhibits and books. Baer, executive producer of *Law and Order:SVU* and formerly a producer and writer for *ER*, is also a physician; Pulitzer-prize nominated photographer Jim Hubbard, Venice Arts' creative director, is considered a pioneer in the field of subject-produced documentary photography, and is founder of the internationally acclaimed photography project with homeless and Native America children, *Shooting Back*. Both Baer's agency, Paradigm, and Dick Wolf's Wolf Films, as well as the Kaiser Family Foundation, have donated generously to assure the success of the project.

A team from Venice Arts, along with Dr. Baer, will depart for Cape Town in early February to work with women at the much-lauded Mothers' Programmes, recently visited and recognized by **First Lady Laura Bush**. The Mothers' Programmes provides peer-based AIDS education and clinical programs for HIV infected women across 60 sites in five provinces of South Africa. Most of the women at their Cape Town clinics hail from the Eastern Cape and reside in Cape Town's impoverished townships. Many Mothers Programmes' participants are women who have chosen to fight the stigma associated with HIV disease by "coming out" about their illness and working to educate and support other pregnant women—mothers to mothers-to-be—and, hopefully, to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

## Mother to Mother

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South Africa is an epicenter of the worldwide AIDS epidemic. According to the Mothers Programmes, "Each year one million babies are born in South Africa and more than 250,000 of them are born to mothers who are living with HIV. Without treatment, over 25% of these mothers will transmit the virus to their newborns—accounting for nearly 70,000 children born each year with the virus that causes AIDS." Additionally, according to United Nations estimates, HIV disease has orphaned an additional 660,000 South African children.

### **Background on Venice Arts' Photo Documentary Projects**

Lynn Warshafsky, co-founder of Venice Arts, reports that they have brought photography, film, and digital arts programs to numerous communities for the past 13 years—not only in greater Los Angeles, but also in rural communities in America's southern states, and Detroit's inner city. Venice Arts also took a group of youth photographers to Durban, South Africa to document the **U.N.'s World Conference Against Racism**. More recently, Venice Arts completed a project with West Hollywood's Russian immigrant youth. On an ongoing basis, the energetic staff and volunteer artists at Venice Arts provide arts-based gang prevention programs to youth living in Mar Vista Gardens housing project, Venice, and the Pico neighborhood of Santa Monica.

About this project, Ms. Warshafsky says, "Neal Baer, Jim Hubbard and the rest of the Venice Arts team are imminently qualified to teach photo-documentary methods to women at The Mothers Programmes. We think that it they will create a very powerful, multi-dimensional visual story that will raise awareness—both in Cape Town and in the U.S.—about the continuing, international story of living with AIDS."

An exhibit of the photographs will premier in the United States at the Venice Family Clinic's annual **Art Walk, May 2006**, and will then travel to several other venues. A book featuring the photographs and an introduction by Dr. Baer is also being planned along with an accompanying video of the project.

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