The ninth annual African World AIDS Day (AWAD) Event will take place 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Saturday, December 8th at the Safari Restaurant and Banquet Center, 3010 4th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN. The free event is sponsored by the AWAD Planning Committee and Safari Restaurant.

“Many African immigrants living in Minnesota believe that they don’t have to worry about HIV/AIDS anymore since they left Africa,” said Dennis London, Chairperson, AWAD Planning Committee. “Unfortunately, the statistics in Minnesota are showing a very different situation.”

According to the latest reports from the Minnesota Department of Health, Africans represented fifteen percent (15%) of all new cases reported in 2011 and thirteen percent (13%) of all persons living with HIV– yet, they represented only one percent (1%) of the state’s total population. The HIV infection rates that year for Africans were nearly 19 times greater than whites. There are 944 Africans that are estimated to be currently living with HIV in Minnesota.

“Our theme for this year’s event is ‘Getting to Zero: Ending Stigma to Enhance HIV Prevention in the African Communities,’” said London. “High levels of stigma and negative attitudes towards HIV/AIDS are preventing our communities from taking action to prevent HIV/AIDS from spreading. To stop AIDS, we need to change this.”

Organizers say the event will include vital information about the prevention, testing and treatment of HIV infection. The whole goal is to save lives by eliminating stigma and “getting to zero” with the number of new HIV infections being reported.

African youth performance groups, community leaders, expert speakers, agency exhibits, free HIV testing and a free lunch will be included for the observance of AWAD 2012. Speakers will include: Farhiya Farah, PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health and Allison LaPointe, MPH, Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit Supervisor, STD and HIV Section, Minnesota Department of Health. A Somali youth performance group, KAJOOG, will also perform.

The AWAD event is free and open to the general public. A free lunch will be served at Noon and free HIV testing will be offered throughout the event. For more information, contact Dennis London, Chair, AWAD Planning Committee, 952-594-0807 (cell), or by email at: dmlondon118@gmail.com.