



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

Brown Lloyd James
Margaret Hoffecker – 212.486.7070
margareth@brownlloydjames.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FIRST-EVER “WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY,”
SPEARHEADED BY STATE OF QATAR AND AUTISM SPEAKS,
TO BE MARKED ACROSS THE GLOBE BY THE UNITED
NATIONS, NGOS, MEDIA**

*April 2 Activities Include Official United Nations Kickoff, Worldwide Celebrations
and “Walk on the Web” to Highlight Global Autism Awareness*

NEW YORK, (April 1, 2008) -- World Autism Awareness Day, an unprecedented global effort to heighten awareness about the disorder that affects millions of individuals and families, will be marked for the first time ever on April 2. Spearheaded by the State of Qatar with the support of the world’s largest global autism advocacy group Autism Speaks, events celebrating the day will take place in 25 countries on six continents and in venues ranging from the United Nations to the New York Stock Exchange in the United States, to health and educational facilities in Bahrain, Panama and South Africa, among others.

At the United Nations, Qatar’s Permanent Representative and sponsor of the UN resolution, His Excellency Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, will host a panel event in which he, along with Bob and Suzanne Wright, co-founders of Autism Speaks, and the World Health Organization (WHO) will address U.N. staff, the media, and members of the autism community. The panel event will focus on the role of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, academia, and family in addressing autism. Additional speakers include H.E. Sha Zukang, Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs; H.E. Ambassador Iñigo de Palacio Espana of Spain; Dr. Asma Al-Attiyah of the Council for Family Affairs in Qatar; Mr. Andrey V. Pirogov of the WHO; Paul Shattock of World Autism Organization; Sameera Al-Qassimi of the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs in Doha, Qatar; and Professor Tony Monaco, director of the Wellcome Trust Center of Human Genetics at Oxford University, U.K.

Following the discussion, the Magical Music for Life Foundation, a group that includes several children with autism, will perform “There’s a Light,” a song that encompasses the spirit of World Autism Awareness Day. In addition, an art show at the United Nations, sponsored by the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs, will feature artworks by artists with autism from around the world.

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person’s ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by extreme behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the

United States, affecting four times as many boys than girls. The diagnosis of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The U.S.-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

“Autism is indeed a global health crisis. And it is growing. Raising awareness is one of the keys to early diagnosis and to building public consensus for finding a cure,” Ambassador Al-Nasser said. “That’s why Her Highness Sheikha Mozah and the State of Qatar have pledged their full support to this worthy day.”

World Autism Awareness Day was passed through the current 62nd U.N. General Assembly Session, garnering consensus support from all United Nations Member States. On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly, by unanimous consent, passed the resolution of the Third Committee designating April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day in perpetuity starting in 2008.

“Autism knows no geographic boundaries - it affects individuals and families on every continent and in every country,” Suzanne Wright, co-founder of Autism Speaks, said. “The celebration of World Autism Awareness Day is an important way to help the world better understand the scope of this health crisis and the need for compassion and acceptance for those living with autism. This remarkable day – the first of many to come – promises to be a time of great hope and happiness as we work to build a global autism community.

Autism Speaks just formed a partnership with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the NIH, the Carso Health Institute of Mexico, and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research to develop programs to promote international collaboration among countries in North, South, and Central America; the development of research expertise with a focus on public health and screening and early diagnosis; and enhanced service delivery across the Americas by providing training to professional service providers that focuses on screening, diagnosis and educational intervention.

Other World Autism Awareness Day highlights:

On April 2, an art exhibit will open in the East Lobby of the U.N.’s Secretariat Building that will feature paintings and drawings by more than 15 artists with autism from all over the world. The opening will take place following the panel event, and several of the artists will be present to discuss the meaning of their work.

World Autism Awareness Day ceremonies will also take place at the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs in Doha, Qatar, during the first two weeks of April. Earlier this month, Autism Speaks and the Shafallah Center announced a new partnership designed to increase global autism awareness and speed the pace of autism research worldwide. On World Autism Awareness Day, new autism screening activities will commence at Shafallah.

Bob and Suzanne Wright, along with other families affected by autism, will help kick off World Autism Awareness Day in the United States with a visit to the New York

Stock Exchange to ring the opening bell. Throughout the day – and during Autism Awareness Month taking place in April – people from around the world will take part in the Autism Speaks “Walk Now on the Web,” which will help raise funds for autism programs and research. Select Barnes & Noble bookstores in the United States will host “Story Time” events with celebrities and others on April 2, and over 500 Barnes & Noble stores will host such events throughout Autism Awareness Month. The day will conclude with a special performance of Feld Entertainment’s Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden in New York City, tailored to children with autism and their families. The arena will feature quiet rooms where children can take a break but still enjoy the show. The event signifies the launch of a year-long partnership between the “Greatest Show on Earth” and Autism Speaks.

Many other international autism organizations will also display artworks by artists with autism in their celebrations of World Autism Awareness Day, including Bahrain’s Society for Children with Behavioral and Communication Difficulties and India’s Action for Autism. In Bahrain, the entire month of April will be dedicated to raising awareness, through local television talk shows where parents of children with autism will be discussing their experiences, an awareness booth at the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix on April 4, 5 and 6, and visits to local schools. In New Delhi, India, an Action for Autism will host an “Autism Awareness Jamboree,” and Action for Autism will send awareness packets to parliament members, hang banners at popular areas, and enjoy a celebration that will provide free consultations from a team of psychologists.

In Brunei Darussalam, the Society for the Management of Autism-Related Issues in Training, Education and Resources (SMARTER) will celebrate WAAD with their Annual SMARTER Challenge, which includes the challenge of climbing seven hills in one day. The seven hills represent the mastering of seven life skills that are necessary seven days a week for families of children with autism: personal management, home management, leisure (spiritual) management, academic management, vocational management, employment management, and family management.

The Kuwait Center for Autism has been dedicated to raising autism awareness in recent years, and this year will celebrate WAAD in a way they have done in the past: with a Walkathon for Autism (photos from last year’s event can be seen below). They will also host workshops for parents, interviews with the media, and an autism sports contest.

The National Workshop in Nigeria’s capital will raise awareness via specialized lectures, movies, exhibitions, and the signing of the Nigerian Autism Proclamation. Guest of Honor at this workshop is the wife of the President of Nigeria, Hajia Turai Yar’ Adua. During this national workshop the Defeat Autism in Nigeria (DAIN) initiative will also be launched.

In South Africa, Autism Western Cape is planning a “Billionaire\$ Ball” in Cape Town, where the cover charge will help raise funds to benefit autistic people and further their education. Also in South Africa, the Key School in Johannesburg will print T-shirts to be worn on the day to raise awareness of autism.

In addition, Autism Speaks U.K. will hold an “Authors for Autism Research” character auction on eBay, which began March 23 and ends April 2. Bidders will be vying to have their name given to a character in the future work of a leading English author. Among the authors participating are RJ Ellory, Ken Follet, Marti Leimbach, and Esther Freud. Isobel Bayonaras, president of the World Autism Organization, will also speak at the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism at the House of Commons on April 2 on international developments in autism.

World Autism Awareness Day plans for Autism Speaks Canada includes efforts to involve national media to bring attention to this historic day. Federal and provincial government representatives are being encouraged to wear a puzzle piece pin and officially recognize April 2 in the House of Commons and provincial legislatures.

Australia also has big plans for raising autism awareness – the organization Autism Spectrum will host events that will take place Tuesday, May 20, in Sydney and will feature an exhibition of works composed by adults with an autism spectrum disorder, an art project aimed at developing fine motor skills, attention span and pride in accomplishment, and an awards ceremony to celebrate and recognize the outstanding contributions and achievements of extraordinary people and organizations in the autism spectrum community.

The Sundance Channel will host the television premiere of the acclaimed documentary “Autism Every Day” on April 2. The film, which debuted at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, documents a typical 24-hour day in the lives of eight families struggling to raise children with autism. “Autism Every Day” shows how developmental skills that most parents take for granted - a child’s ability to brush his teeth or communicate a need – can prove enormous hurdles for a child with autism. At the same time, the film captures the unconditional, powerful love these parents have for their children.

To learn more about these and other events Autism Speaks has planned for World Autism Awareness Day events, visit www.worldautismawarenessday.org, a website launched especially for this day and in partnership with Autism Speaks.

About Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks is dedicated to increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders, to funding research into the causes, prevention and treatments for autism, and to advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. It was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Vice Chairman, General Electric, and served as chairman and chief executive officer of NBC Universal for more than twenty years. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org.

###