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## **AUTISM SPEAKS AND AUTISM-EUROPE CELEBRATE WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY IN EUROPE WITH NYSE/EURONEXT**

### **Global Bell Ringing Ceremonies will Honor World Autism Awareness Day Throughout Europe**

Brussels (April 1, 2011) – For a second year running Autism Speaks is collaborating with Autism-Europe and NYSE/Euronext to celebrate the United Nation’s World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) on April 2. Autism Speaks and Autism-Europe will ring the opening and closing New York Stock Exchange/Euronext bells on Friday, April 1 in locations in the U.S. and across Europe. Duncan Niederauer, CEO and a Director of NYSE/Euronext, and parent of a child with autism, has generously given the honor of ringing the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange to Autism Speaks each year since the inception of WAAD. To help raise awareness of the global impact of autism, Autism-Europe and its members will join Autism Speaks and participate in bell ringing ceremonies in Amsterdam, Brussels, Lisbon and Paris.

Children and persons with autism face major challenges associated with stigma and discrimination, as well as a lack of access to support. Many struggle with multiple barriers in their daily lives. Far too many suffer terrible discrimination, abuse and isolation, in violation of their fundamental human rights, as underlined by Ban Ki-moon, General Secretary of the United Nations.

In Amsterdam, Netherlands, the Dutch Autism Association (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Autisme) will chime the closing gong for the third year in a row; in Brussels, Belgium, representatives of Autism-Europe, APEPA and Vlaamse Vereniging Autisme will ring the opening bell; in Lisbon, Portugal, the Federação Portuguesa de Autismo (APPDA Lisboa) will ring the closing bell; and in Paris, France, the President of Autism-Europe, Mrs. Evelyne Friedel, will ring the closing bell.

“Autism Speaks is excited to continue our collaboration with Autism-Europe, and we wish to express our gratitude to the NYSE/Euronext for helping to spread autism awareness,” said Bob Wright, Autism Speaks co-founder. “These annual bell ringing ceremonies bring much needed attention to a disorder that affects approximately 1 in 110 children in the United States and countless others around the world.”

“Autism-Europe is delighted to have the opportunity to cooperate again with Autism Speaks and NYSE/Euronext to raise awareness about autism on a global level”, said Evelyne Friedel, President of Autism-Europe, “it is essential that information about the complex difficulties faced by persons with autism and their families on a daily basis is spread, in order to ensure a better future for them.”

## **About Autism**

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 110 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism increased 57 percent from 2002 to 2006. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

## **About Autism Speaks**

Autism Speaks is North America's largest autism science and advocacy organization. Since its inception in 2005, Autism Speaks has made enormous strides, committing over \$160 million to research through 2014 and developing innovative new resources for families. The organization is dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. In addition to funding research, Autism Speaks has created resources and programs including the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network, Autism Speaks' Autism Genetic Resource Exchange and several other scientific and clinical programs. Notable awareness initiatives include the establishment of the annual United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, which Autism Speaks celebrates through its Light it Up Blue initiative. Also, Autism Speaks award-winning "Learn the Signs" campaign with the Ad Council has received over \$258 million in donated media. Autism Speaks' family resources include the Autism Video Glossary, a 100 Day Kit for newly-diagnosed families, a School Community Tool Kit and a community grant program. Autism Speaks has played a critical role in securing federal legislation to advance the government's response to autism, and has successfully advocated for insurance reform to cover behavioral treatments in 23 states thus far, with bills pending in an additional 14 states. Each year *Walk Now for Autism Speaks* events are held in more than 80 cities across North America. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).

## **About the Co-Founders**

Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Senior Advisor at Lee Equity Partners, Chairman and CEO of the Palm Beach Civic Association and served as vice chairman, General Electric, and chief executive officer of NBC and NBC Universal for more than twenty years. He also serves on the boards of the Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation, RAND Corporation and the New York Presbyterian Hospital. Suzanne Wright has an extensive history of active involvement in community and philanthropic endeavors, mostly directed toward helping children. She is a Trustee Emeritus of Sarah Lawrence College, her alma mater. Suzanne has received numerous awards, the Women of Distinction Award from Palm Beach Atlantic University, the CHILD Magazine Children's Champions Award, Luella Bennack Volunteer Award, Spirit of Achievement award by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine's National Women's Division and The Women of Vision Award from the Weizmann Institute of Science. In 2008, the Wrights were named to the *Time* 100 Heroes and Pioneers category, a list of the most influential people in the world, for their commitment to global autism advocacy. They have also received numerous awards such as the first ever Double Helix Award for Corporate Leadership, NYU Child Advocacy Award, Castle Connolly National Health Leadership Award and The American Ireland Fund Humanitarian Award. In May of 2010 they received Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Degrees from St. John's University in Queens and delivered the commencement address as the first married couple to be bestowed such an honor.

### **About Autism-Europe**

Autism-Europe is an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of persons with autism and their families and to help them improve their quality of life.

Autism-Europe's overarching mission is indeed to improve the quality of life of all persons with autism and their families by promoting and defending their rights. This is achieved through:

- Representing persons with autism towards all European institutions
- Promoting awareness on the appropriate care, education, and well-being of persons with autism
- Promoting the exchange of information, good practices and experience.

Autism-Europe constitutes a European network which ensures effective liaison between approximately 80 member associations of parents of persons with autism in 30 European countries, governments and European and international institutions.

In order to implement its objectives, Autism Europe has built strategic alliances with social partners to maximise its impact on EU policies. Autism-Europe is a founding member of and strictly collaborates with the European Disability Forum and the Platform of European Social NGOs.

Autism-Europe has also established a structured dialogue with the European Institutions of the European Union, and of the Council of Europe, as well as with the World Health Organisation.