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**LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT TO TOUR BOLIVIA FOR SOUTH AMERICAN
PREMIERE OF "AGENTS & ASSETS"**

**PRODUCTION CONSIDERS
U.S. HYPOCRISY AND CULPABILITY IN FAILED DRUG WAR**

Los Angeles, CA – At a time when the Obama administration has renounced the “war on drugs” rhetoric, making a major shift in policy by acknowledging the U.S.’s culpability in the international drug trade, the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) is embarking on a Bolivian tour for the South American premiere of Agents & Assets. The play dramatizes a 1998 Congressional hearing about the CIA’s alleged involvement in the crack cocaine epidemic.

This July, five members of the Skid Row-based theater troupe LA Poverty Department will travel to Bolivia for a six and a half week residency project that will culminate in twelve Spanish-language performances with a combined cast of LAPDers and Bolivianos from Cochabamba. Boliviano cast members will include formerly incarcerated actors, formerly homeless youth and small farmers from coca growing regions. The project brings together victims of the so-called “War on Drugs” in Bolivia and those in the U.S., people whose lives have been radically impacted by drugs, either because they are formerly addicted, or because they live in communities that have been devastated by drugs and the drug war. The U.S. provided nearly \$1.3 billion in “anti-drug and development assistance” to Bolivia in the last decade — all tied to eradication of coca crops, which devastated the livelihood of the indigenous people who cultivate it.

Performances will take place from Aug. 6 till 23 in Cochabamba, Potosi, Oruro, La Paz, El Alto, Sucre and Santa Cruz. Each performance will be followed by public community discussion.

Based in LA's Skid Row since 1985, LAPD creates performance work that connects lived experience of people in poverty to the social forces that shape their lives. For this production, LAPD is collaborating with theater maker Wiler Vidaurre Tapia, director of the Escuela de Arte y Talentos, whose groundbreaking Abracadabra Project has for eight years created theater inside the prison in Cochabamba. LAPD will also collaborate with Teatro de los Andes and Fundación Pachamama in Sucre, Bolivia.

The text of Agents & Assets is the March 18, 1998, hearing transcript from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, which explored the allegations made in a 1996 series of articles by journalist Gary Webb in the San Jose Mercury News, alleging CIA/Nicaraguan involvement in crack cocaine trafficking into Los Angeles.

LAPD has performed Agents & Assets to great acclaim previously in Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York and the Netherlands. In each city LAPD has partnered with drug recovery programs to create a cast of real-life veterans of the crack cocaine epidemic.

AGENTS & ASSETS examines the consequences of the "War on Drugs," allowing the audience and performers to see how U.S. policies here and in far away places like Bolivia, Nicaragua, etc. impact local communities, drug-torn families, their friends and neighbors. "This approach allows us to consider what

happens when something is labeled a 'war.'" Agents & Assets' director Malpede says, "The 'War on Drugs', as the name clearly states, imposed a military solution on a public health and social problem, and in doing so, turned our own citizens into the enemy and then proceeds to victimize them and their communities."

LAPD's tour coincides with a major shift in US drug policy. President Obama has vowed to beef up efforts in drug prevention and treatment, which took a funding hit in the Bush years. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently said that some 30 years of U.S. efforts to curb drug demand have "largely failed," adding that the US with its "insatiable" demand for illegal drugs, bears "co-responsibility" for rampant recent drug-related violence in Mexico along the U.S. border. Meanwhile, the administration's nominee for director of National Drug Control Policy said he will take a renewed focus on the prevention and treatment if he is confirmed as the nation's new drug czar. The U.S. still has some of the world's highest rates of illegal drug use. The number of those jailed for drug offenses has soared from roughly 50,000 in 1980 to 500,000 in 2007.

Meanwhile, Bolivian President Evo Morales continues fight the criminalization of the coca leaf. In March, Morales spoke a meeting of the U.N. Committee on Narcotic Drugs, which is drafting a ten-year narcotics strategy. Morales opened a baggie, put a leaf in his mouth and began chewing. Ingenious people, especially workers, chew to numb the stomach, reducing hunger. Laborers, chew for a caffeine-like energy boost. "This is a coca leaf. This is not cocaine," Morales told the delegation. "This represents the culture of indigenous people of the Andean region." Cocaine is a hundred-year-old invention of a Swiss chemist.

"For this LAPD, the weapons are words...
explored by actors who have seen policies turned into street level experience."
Los Angeles Times

"The Los Angeles Poverty Department, despite the homeless status of many of its members, has thrived for years from its downtown outpost and continues to offer theater that's often stunning in its honesty and lacking in pretension."
L.A. Weekly

"The Los Angeles Poverty Department has become
one of the country's most outspoken and profound theater troupes."
Real Detroit

This production of AGENTS & ASSETS is made possible through support of the National Performance Network and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.

ABOUT LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT

LAPD was founded in 1985 by John Malpede. Based in LA's Skid Row, LAPD creates performance work that connects lived experience to the social forces that shape the lives and communities of people living in poverty. LAPD is committed to creating high-quality, challenging performances that express the realities, hopes, and dreams of people who live and work in Los Angeles' Skid Row, and is dedicated to building community and to the artistic and personal development of its members. For more information visit www.lapovertydept.org

ABOUT SKID ROW

Skid Row Los Angeles is the poorest area in the city. Skid Row Los Angeles has the largest concentration of homeless people of any neighborhood in the US. Despite its poverty, Skid Row is an amazing place with amazing human and community strengths:

- Skid Row LA has the largest concentration of the most affordable housing in Los Angeles County.
- Skid Row has the largest concentration and most comprehensive set of services for homeless people in Los Angeles.
- Skid Row is the biggest recovery culture anywhere. Skid Row's highly developed drug recovery consciousness includes free recovery programs and numerous AA, NA and CA groups.

The Skid Row community has long been a generative site for visionary answers to social problems. These visionary initiatives have come about through individual and collective concern by community members and moments of enlightened public policy and visionary NGO efforts. Largely underappreciated is the extent to which the visionary efforts have been the work of community members. Without the civic engagement of citizens of Skid Row, the housing stock would not have been preserved, the people and social services would have been dispersed and the Safe Haven recovery community would not exist.