

An AIDS-Free Generation

Address to the South African Human Sciences Research Council on
World AIDS Day

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Good morning. I am honored to speak with such a distinguished audience and appreciate Dr. Olive Shisana's kind invitation. I am delighted to spend World AIDS Day 2011 at the South African Human Sciences Research Council. I bring you greetings from the U.S.

Department of Health and Human's Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius.

From its emergence in the early 1980s until just over ten years ago, when many of us attended the watershed Durban International AIDS Conference, AIDS often appeared to be advancing unchecked in Africa. Antiretroviral treatment was unavailable or unaffordable, and health systems were reeling from overwhelming demand.

Today, thanks to the unprecedented commitment from the global community, spearheaded by more than \$40 billion already dedicated through U.S. Government's PEPFAR program, the situation is markedly different. Although there are still over 22 million people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, the concrete commitments of the global community have brought hope and life to millions of people across the world with effective prevention, treatment and care programs. Thanks to science, popular demand and political will, the prospect of halting and even reversing the trajectory of the epidemic is now at hand.

UNAIDS just released its annual report and confirmed the good news: nearly 50 percent of all people eligible for HIV treatment now have access; nearly 50 percent of pregnant women living with HIV received antiretroviral therapy to prevent transmitting the virus to their child; five more countries have reported declines in HIV prevalence among young people. Today, out of 24 countries, 21 are reporting declines in HIV prevalence. Truly, our glass is at last more than half full, and the trends are positive.

Throughout the world not only do we rejoice at this good news, but we also collectively have a bigger dream: we now dare to dream of an “AIDS-Free generation.” In a major policy speech given just three weeks ago, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called on the United States and other nations to use the new scientific information to create an “AIDS-Free Generation.”

Over the past eight years, The United States has worked with you who are at the forefront of the fight against HIV/AIDS through PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Today, President Obama’s Global Health Initiative is using PEPFAR’s strong platform to propel the fight against HIV/AIDS to a whole new level, and the science is on our side. We are optimistic on the potential for creating an “AIDS-Free Generation” by using the latest scientifically proven tools to interrupt the transmission to the next generation.

Let me mention three leading interventions:

- Treatment as Prevention: Recent studies, such as HPTN 052 has demonstrated the effectiveness of treatment to reduce transmission to others.
- Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission: Effective PMTCT programs can nearly eliminate vertical transmission from mother to child in non-breast feeding population.
- Male Circumcision: Studies show that this intervention can significantly reduce the relative risk of acquiring new infections, at a level of efficacy on a par with a good vaccine.

In combination with counseling and testing, condom promotion and other effective prevention methods, these interventions are pushing the potential for an AIDS-Free Generation to a tipping point. Later today, in Washington, President Obama will make a major speech committing the United States to an aggressive new course that will significantly accelerate the day when HIV/AIDS becomes a historical relic.

The U.S. Government is committed to continuing the fight to end the scourge of HIV/AIDS. And we are committed to maintaining our vital

partnership in this effort with the people and the government of South Africa. Let me be clear: there has been talk, and concern, that because of our own budget challenges, the U.S. could be on the verge of withdrawing from our longstanding commitment to addressing AIDS in South Africa. We are not. Rather, because of emerging science, and the welcome developments in the South African government's own capacities and commitments to addressing prevention and treatment among your citizens, the United States is looking toward a fuller partnership in which we can play a supportive role. Our annual budget of more than \$500 million for South Africa should be ample evidence of our continuing commitment.

We are also urging the global community to keep fighting. Despite the state of the global economy, or maybe because of it, we should capitalize on the gains we have made this past decade. Richer countries must fulfill the commitments they have made, as the United States is doing. But also, emerging economies must take greater ownership of the

fight against HIV/AIDS to ensure the health of their populations, which can only lead to greater economic growth.

The challenge is still huge, but we have shown that we can beat HIV/AIDS, and we are today on the verge of an AIDS-free generation.

Together, let us prevail in our war against this killer virus, and against inequity in health wherever we find it.

Thank you for your attention.