

(Translated from the French)

ADDRESS BY

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**AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE
SECOND CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL AIDS
SOCIETY AND THE SUPPORT CONFERENCE FOR THE
GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND
MALARIA**

PALAIS DES CONGRÈS – WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 2003.

President of the Commission of the European Union,

Presidents,

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

AIDS is a powerful and crafty scourge which is shaking our societies to their core; powerfully spreading everywhere, with nothing, so far, able to stop it, craftily appearing where it is not expected and showing a remarkable ability to fight back when attacked.

In less than a generation, AIDS has exacted a terrible tribute from the human race. In France, it has meant thousands of lives interrupted prematurely - I am thinking in particular of homosexuals and hemophiliacs; the lives of women and men ended in

their prime. In the rest of the world, first and foremost in Africa, it has meant a tragedy of immense proportions and a serious threat to development efforts. With the rapid spread of the pandemic, the lifeblood is being drained from young nations; more and more children, often themselves infected, are being made orphans; and anguish has gripped whole countries which AIDS threatens to deprive of a future.

The epidemic is made worse by the ostracism that still attaches to it. Intolerable discrimination continues to exist in everyday life, with people unable to find or keep jobs and housing. 110 countries refuse entry to foreigners carrying the virus. Instead of listening to the suffering, instead of

perceiving the threat, too many societies condemn and refuse to see.

This is why, in closing your two conferences, I want above all to thank you.

I thank the research workers and physicians from North and South who unremittingly struggle, often without adequate resources, to understand, to develop more effective treatments, to put together social policies and to help the sufferers and their families. I especially thank those who are devoting themselves to the children and adolescents struck by an evil too terrible to bear.

I thank the civic organizations which embody the determination of the sick and their families to refuse

to be victims and to actively fight the disease. In marshalling their forces, in talking with the scientific and medical communities, in drawing the attention of political representatives to the issue, in adopting an approach based on world-wide solidarity, these civic organizations are not only bringing hope and comfort to those who are ill. They are fostering democracy and enabling societies to mature.

I wish, today, to issue a solemn appeal.

An appeal to governments of donor countries all over the world to show more generosity, despite budgetary difficulties. This is not an act of charity; it is an act of shared responsibility in standing up to a global scourge.

An appeal to the developing and transition countries to set the fight against AIDS as a national priority.

An appeal to businesses, well-represented here, to do even more.

As your work, which has opened up so many avenues of hope, comes to a close this evening, I want to tell you how France intends to pursue the fight against AIDS.

To accelerate research into effective treatments and a vaccine;

To boost awareness, which is still inadequate;

To make prevention and access to health care universal.

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To first understand, in order to act effectively. Many areas remain obscure. A review of your scientific research bears witness to this. When it comes to transmission mechanisms; immune response during infection and latency; response to treatment and resistance; and viral mutations and their consequences, we must step up our efforts to shed light on the behaviour of HIV and to control it.

Now that there are increasingly effective treatments - which have saved the lives of thousands but which are costly, difficult and of uncertain long-term efficacy - governments and medical authorities must organize a dialogue among research scientists, physicians and patients. We know how urgent and painful is the wait undergone by patients for whom

the therapies have failed and how much hope the new drugs represent for them. But we also know how important it is that the treatments be rigorously tested before they are distributed. In this epidemic scientists and doctors are discovering the disease as patients simultaneously fight it, and it is by working together that they will find the drugs that can one day wipe out the virus.

Clearly the most satisfactory outcome will be the development of a preventive or therapeutic vaccine. Special efforts are needed to fund the work under way. I commend the endeavours of the public and private research institutes and laboratories and the spirit of collaboration which your conference exemplifies.

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But although scientists and patients are increasingly co-ordinating their efforts in both the South and the North, awareness, I am afraid, is still insufficient and even, in places, waning.

In the developed countries the advent of multiple therapies and a certain weariness of complying with the discipline of prevention have prompted a renewed trend toward risky behaviour. The critical importance of responsibility – both collective and individual – in dealing with this disease cannot be overstated. Screening is often performed too late: half the new cases are detected only at the time the first symptoms appear. I wish to stress that education for the young is imperative and how

crucial awareness-raising is for adults. We must also constantly adapt the awareness and prevention effort to the new groups most affected - in France, today, especially heterosexuals, including many young women of African origin.

In supporting certain vulnerable communities - for example sex workers and drug users - we must strike the right balance. We must strike hard at the traffickers, those who deal in drugs, prostitution and slavery; and succour the victims of these crimes, in a spirit of humanity and to protect public health.

Awareness must also be raised in Africa. Today the subject is being dealt with more forthrightly by governments and societies. The commitment of African women has been exemplary. I pay tribute to

the personal endeavours of President Nelson Mandela, who honoured us with his presence, and of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. They are driving back fear, shame and taboo. But much remains to be done to ensure that AIDS is seen not as a shameful disease or a curse, but as a scourge threatening the stability and development of the entire continent.

This awareness must become widespread. WHO and UNAIDS studies have clearly shown that the disease is spreading in Asia, in Russia, in the CIS countries and in the Central and Eastern European countries. It is urgent that the populations and the leaders of these countries adopt a state of alert and put in place effective prevention and health care policies, in order to ward off a tragedy.

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But everyone understands that prevention without hope of treatment cannot be effective. And here, we must unstintingly reject a number of ideas that are wrong and even immoral.

We still hear it said that AIDS is a disease of one or another population. In reality, no one is safe. This is a pandemic that threatens all countries and all peoples.

Some dare to argue publicly that distributing drugs in poor countries is ineffective since, they claim, patients in poor countries are unable to adhere to their treatment. The reasoning behind this statement

is unacceptable. Surveys show that the administration of drugs is equally effective in the South and the North, provided of course that appropriate health care facilities are available.

And finally some claim that the prevention effort is economically more efficient than distributing therapeutic drugs. The economic argument is short-sighted. The cost of the epidemic is far greater than the cost of administering treatment. It has even been demonstrated that the promise of treatment boosts the effectiveness of prevention policies - there is a continuum stretching from the establishment of health care systems to the implementation of prevention policies and treatment; and national policies to fight AIDS act as catalysts for development policies by mobilizing the nation in

support of public health, education, solidarity and democracy goals.

This is why it is urgent that the discussion on conditions governing access to drugs be concluded. We committed ourselves within the WHO to ensuring that 3 million AIDS victims receive treatment by 2005, that is, about half those requiring treatment, given their health status. This falls far short of what is needed, and yet it is setting our sights high. It makes it particularly urgent to conclude, before Cancun as pledged by the G8, discussions in the WTO on access to drugs for poor non-producer countries. You are aware of France's position: we must conclude this discussion in a spirit of generosity. Solutions are there to ensure that we can achieve this result without useless restrictions and

without jeopardizing intellectual property, which underpins research.

At the same time we must accelerate discussions and perform trials on differential pricing. Already the cost of treatments has come down and the economic viability of massively supplying the poor at cost price has been demonstrated. As we deal with this issue we must keep our eyes on the long-term goals. I call on the pharmaceutical industry in particular, the industry of hope par excellence, to do this. For the pharmaceutical industry the trust and respect of world public opinion are at stake, as are its long-term interests and the development of its markets. It is essential that it go forward, establishing a true partnership with governments and all the other players involved.

Finally, we must raise more resources. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is an outstanding instrument. It was set up in record time. It is already operating on the ground, saving lives. Naturally we will assess its efficiency very carefully. But I am convinced that this multilateral response expresses, better than any other, the ideal of solidarity and collective action that must impel us.

The Fund needs, to start with, 3 billion dollars every year. The European Union and its Member States, which are already providing more than half the Fund's resources, must set an example. Together with Tony Blair and Romano Prodi in particular, we want the European contribution to amount to a billion dollars a year. For this reason France has

decided to triple its contribution and provide 150 million euros a year to the Fund. I welcomed, with hope, the generous action taken by the United States in committing 15 billion dollars to the fight against AIDS over the next 5 years. I express the hope that a large portion, a billion dollars, will go to the Global Fund every year. This European and American commitment will encourage other donor States to come forward. We are still far from meeting our goal. This is why I will continue to fight in all international fora to convince governments to make a commitment to long-term funding for the Fund.

Beyond contributions by States, the Fund needs to work with business which can make a contribution in a wide variety of ways. Experiments carried out in Africa demonstrate the effectiveness of

public/private partnerships and of treating patients within companies. A large number of heads of companies have decided to make the expertise of their teams available to the Fund. I also thank the foundations and private donors who have decided to become actively involved.

We must also seek other sources of funding, such as voluntary levies on certain private-sector commercial transactions and, in the medium term, recourse to forms of international taxation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the disease appeared in the early 1980s, the human race has suffered terribly but it has won major victories. Twenty years ago, Professors Gallo and Montagnier, with their teams, identified the virus. Seven years ago, the first combination therapies appeared, saving the lives of thousands of victims and offering new hope to millions of people living with AIDS. For the last several years the need for North-South solidarity has been better recognized. Today, we have the medical and financial resources to control the epidemic.

AIDS is not just a disease which attacks the immune systems of individuals. Mankind as a whole has a duty to respond to this global scourge.

We owe it to the victims of AIDS, we owe it to young people and to future generations to show a spirit of responsibility, a spirit of partnership, a spirit of solidarity, aimed at bringing the nightmare of this fatal, massive and irreversible disease to an end at long last.

This is the message which you bear and for which I wish, on behalf of France, to thank you.