

Kaisernetwork.org Daily Update from the XV International AIDS Conference

July 15, 2004

At an evening musical event hosted by former South African President Nelson Mandela, a \$50 million pledge was announced from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Mandela called for others to do the same. "It is going to take much more than the resources of the Gates Foundation to achieve the scale-up required to fund the fight against AIDS, TB and Malaria," he said. "We need to build the public-private partnership that is the vision of the Global Fund. We challenge everyone to help fund the Fund now."

Pledges to the Global Fund beyond 2004 fall well short of its projected need to fight the epidemic. In its first 30+ months of operation, the Global Fund has committed \$3 billion to programs in 128 countries. Dr. Helene Gayle is with the Gates Foundation: "We believe it is an important part of the overall global effort and is making real progress in expanding life-sustaining AIDS, TB and malaria services," she said. "So we invite others to join us in supporting the Global Fund, and we hope we will be able to fill that resource gap that we all know is the key ingredient to making a difference." However, there are some concerns, namely among U.S. officials, that the Global Fund isn't the most efficient way to get money to local AIDS programs.

Earlier in the day, Mandela, who battled tuberculosis while in prison during Apartheid, spoke about the need to improve TB detection and get patients treated sooner. "The world has made defeating AIDS its top priority," he said. "This is a blessing, but TB remains ignored. Today we are calling on the world to recognize we can't fight AIDS unless we do much more to fight TB as well." TB kills an estimated one-third of AIDS patients.

And finally, researchers continued on a familiar theme at the conference -- the need to give women more prevention options. Dr. Zeda Rosenberg of the International Partnership for Microbicides discussed why female HIV infections are increasing at startling rates. "For women in many parts of the world being poor, young and married are the most significant risk factors for acquiring HIV infection," she said.

In many countries, a woman's status makes it impossible to insist her partner use condoms or be monogamous. Microbicides, topical virus killers women could apply before intercourse, would give them power to protect themselves. But viable microbicides are at least five years from becoming reality.