

Kaisernetwork.org Daily Update from the XV International AIDS Conference July 12, 2004

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni stirred up controversy at today's XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, for his strong stance that abstinence and faithfulness in marriage are the first line of defense against HIV. "I look at the condom as an improvisation -- not a solution -- an improvisation," he said.

While an emphasis on abstinence and faithfulness helped drop prevalence rates in Uganda from 30 percent to an estimated 6 percent, many researchers and advocates, like Uganda's Millie Katana, believe condoms must be an equal part in stopping AIDS. "We cannot afford to water down our prevention strategy to an A and B approach, knowing full well that lives are at stake," she said.

A call to hold global leaders accountable for allocating enough resources to fight AIDS was also sounded at the conference. Recent estimates by UNAIDS say it will cost 12 billion U.S. dollars annually to treat and prevent HIV and AIDS. However, current funding levels fall drastically short of that -- just under 5 billion U.S. dollars a year.

American actor and activist Richard Gere said financing is only part of the solution. "It's not just throwing money at something. This is again going to the leadership -- all of us creating a situation that can even use money," he said. "Money without intelligence, without wisdom is useless."

Even so, it's expected that throughout the week government leaders, advocates and scientists will emphasize the necessity for more funding.