



OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE: DAY 1

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URGING UNIVERSAL ACTION TO END AIDS, 22,000 ASSEMBLE IN MEXICO CITY FOR START OF THE XVII INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

**Human Rights, Gender Issues, and the Strengthening of Health Systems Among
the Top Issues at First International AIDS Conference Held in Latin America**

Mexico City [3 August 2008]—The XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) opens today, with scientists, community and political leaders urging resolute action and commitment on the part of all stakeholders.

"AIDS 2008 is taking place at a unique moment in the epidemic, when there is widespread consensus on the urgency of ensuring universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010," said AIDS 2008 International Co-Chair Dr. Pedro Cahn, President of the International AIDS Society (IAS) and Fundación Huésped in Buenos Aires, Argentina. "What we now need is action on the part of all stakeholders. As we gather in Mexico, each of us must ask ourselves: What can I do to end AIDS? In 2008, there are no longer bystanders in this global struggle," he added.

In 2005, world leaders acting through the United Nations committed to the goal of providing universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support to all those in need by 2010. AIDS 2008 is a collective opportunity to evaluate progress towards this goal and identify strategies for accelerating prevention and treatment scale up. Central to these deliberations will be a discussion of how specifically to tackle the underlying drivers of HIV risk and vulnerability – including gender inequality, human rights violations and HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Another major topic to be explored is the importance of strengthening overall health systems in poor countries.

Sunday, 3 August Opening Session

The week-long event begins on Sunday, 3 August, with welcoming remarks by the AIDS 2008 Co-Chairs and an official opening from Mexican President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa. It will also feature an address by United Nations Director-General Ban Ki-moon, representing his first International AIDS Conference since being appointed in 2006. Other major leaders participating in the Opening Session include: Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, Denzil Douglas; Former President of Botswana, Festus Mogae; First Vice President of Spain, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega; Mexico's Secretary of Health, José Ángel Córdova Villalobos; UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot; and World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan.

The Opening Session will also feature remarks by Ms. Mony Pen, a community activist and advocate for HIV-positive women globally and in Cambodia, and 13-year old youth advocate, Keren Dunaway Gonzales. Since a very young age, Miss Gonzales has spoken publicly about her HIV status in an effort to reduce HIV stigma and discrimination in her home country of Honduras, as well as internationally.

"Today's inspiring panel of Opening Session speakers – representing individuals living with HIV, as well as some of the world's most powerful political figures – symbolizes the unique feature of this conference: to bring together the many diverse participants engaged in and leading the global response to HIV," said AIDS 2008 Local Co-Chair Dr. Luis Soto Ramírez, Head of the Molecular Virology Unit at the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Médicas y Nutrición Salvador Zubirán and Coordinator of the Clinical Care Committee of CONASIDA, Mexico's National AIDS Council. "Mexico is honored to host this seminal event and to welcome the International AIDS Conference to Latin America for the very first time."

The full Opening Session will be webcast live by kaisernetwork.org and is available for viewing during and after the event at www.aids2008.org.

AIDS 2008 Scientific Programme

Over 5,000 abstracts – including 103 late breaker abstracts – will be presented at the conference, selected from the more than 10,600 submissions (another 2,742 abstracts will appear in the CD-ROM only). The full text of all accepted abstracts is available through a searchable database on the AIDS 2008 website.

Among the many issues to be explored through the AIDS 2008 Scientific Programme are: the long-term impact of antiretroviral treatment on brain function; analyses of heart attack risk in patients taking antiretrovirals; the emergence of HIV resistance; and new studies on the relative efficacy of various treatment regimens. Other timely research topics include: recent experience with so-called task shifting, or the use of non-physicians and other medical personnel to provide HIV care in areas with acute physician shortages; the current status of HIV vaccine and microbicides research; how best to approach HIV prevention in both generalized and concentrated epidemics; the use of antiretroviral therapy as a prevention strategy; and the legal and ethical implications of laws to criminalize HIV transmission.

Special Sessions to Highlight Key Issues, Regional Responses

Throughout the week, a number of Special Sessions will highlight key issues. On Monday, the session, *HIV/AIDS and Health System Reform: Achieving Universal Coverage*, will feature former US President Bill Clinton and Julio Frenk, of the Carso Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. A session on Tuesday will feature a report back from Living 2008: The Positive Leadership Summit, a pre-conference by and for people living with HIV. In the Wednesday session, *Looking to the Future—the Epidemic in 2031 and New Directions in AIDS Research*, Anthony Fauci, Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot will speak about the future of AIDS research and the global response, with additional remarks by three community activists from the US, South Africa and Indonesia. On Thursday, a panel of five national AIDS ambassadors will discuss the status of political leadership and accountability for universal action. Other Special Sessions will explore evidence-based approaches to addressing stigma and discrimination; HIV travel restrictions; health systems strengthening; operations research; HIV prevention; and the global financial architecture for HIV/AIDS. Additional sessions will explore strategies to address the needs of children at risk for and living with HIV, as well as the need for the integration of HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.

In addition, for the first time, the conference will offer six region-specific sessions. Each session will feature a range of experts who will help frame a discussion of key issues facing that particular region.

Programme Activities

Open to conference delegates and the general public, the AIDS 2008 Global Village is a space to share knowledge and skills, build coalitions, and promote interactive learning among communities living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Established in 2004, the Youth Programme empowers young people by encouraging youth – including youth living with HIV – to help plan, participate in and benefit from the conference (visit www.youthaids2008.org for more information). Under the theme *Culture in Action*, the AIDS 2008 Cultural Programme will showcase the relationship between AIDS, art and culture. The programme will include activities and exhibits inside the Global Village and at other venues throughout Mexico City. A full schedule of programme activities is available at www.aids2008.org.

Conference Hubs – A New Feature of AIDS 2008

In an effort to expand participation to many who cannot travel to Mexico City, organizers will transmit proceedings to communities around the world through a network of conference hubs. Hubs will feature live and taped feeds of many conference sessions and some will also include moderated discussions. More than 100 hubs in 40 countries are registered, with a capacity of more than 9,500 participants. An Official Hub will be held at the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban, South Africa. All others are independent and will be hosted by nongovernmental organizations, hospitals, universities and government agencies.

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About the Organizers

The International AIDS Conference is convened every other year by the International AIDS Society (IAS), the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals with more than 10,000 members from 172 countries. Local partners include the Federal Government of Mexico, the Government of Mexico City and local scientific and community leadership. International institutional partners for AIDS 2008 include: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and its co-sponsors, the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP); International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO); Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+)/International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW); World YWCA; and the Asian Harm Reduction Network (AHRN).

Additional Resources

For additional information, including programme information, abstracts, rapporteur and scientific summaries, and links to webcasts, podcasts, transcripts and presentations from key conference sessions, please visit www.aids2008.org.

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