

**American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) and the
Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University -
"HIV/AIDS in Asia: Forging a Collective Response"**

**Guest Speakers: Richard Gere and Kenneth Cole
New York, NY
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12/3/02

ALLAN ROSENFELD: We've had a young economist. Now we'll have a young movie actor. Both great contributors to this epidemic.

I'd like to introduce our heroine to everybody who works in the field of AIDS. Jerry Radwin said words about Mathilde this morning. Mathilde Krim truly is one of the heroines of this whole field, being one of the first to recognize the epidemic in the early 1980s here in New York. Co-founding with Elizabeth Taylor what is now the American Foundation for AIDS Research. She is still fully involved in this organization and a leader in this country and abroad, something I think everyone who has come in contact admires greatly. And I'm delighted to be a member of her board, and do whatever it is she tells me I have to do all the time. Mathilde Krim.

[applause]

Thank you. I have a [unintelligible] pleasant duty this afternoon, which is to introduce to you a friend -- a long time friend, a man we all know very well as excellent actor. You know him also as a dedicated philanthropist and a generous one. And first to some of us, he's known as somebody totally committed to the solution to the AIDS crisis throughout the world. He has helped us for a number of years. And I name Mr. Richard Gere.

Although much of the world is only now waking up to the

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problem of AIDS, and to realize how serious and how global it is, Richard Gere has been working for years to combat the spread of HIV in Asia and with represents an -- very large part of the world, and India in particular.

Working with the NES [sp] Foundation in New Delhi, he helped established the AIDS Care Home, the first residential facility in India dedicated to serving women and orphan children infected with HIV. In 1999, he also created the Gere Foundation India Trust based in Delhi to support AIDS prevention programs. The Trust is holding a major AIDS fundraiser in Mumbai [sp], India later this month.

Richard Gere's compassion for disadvantaged and disenfranchised populations has guided his long time activities, among HIV/AIDS and other humanitarian causes. As board chairman of the international campaign for Tibet, he has worked tirelessly to promote and sustain awareness of the Tibetan crisis in national and international forms. He is a co-sponsor of the upcoming New York visit of his holiness, the Dalai Lama in September 2003. It is an honor to have Richard Gere with us today. And I wish he would join me here. Here he is.

[applause]

And I want him to know how grateful we are, you know, for the passion and energy you put in helping us in our efforts. Thank you, Richard.

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[applause]

RICHARD GERE: I'm very happy to be here. Maybe we should get this over with and then I can talk. Thanks, Mathilde. That was very sweet of you.

I'm actually the odd man out here. I have no reason to be here whatsoever. When I listen to these experts and these humanitarian words of hard working, on the ground people here, I feel very out of place and I'm humbled by the experience of being here. But I'll -- I think I'm brain dead from -- that happens after a while. The synapses just stop.

Okay. Thank you. I love even photographers. I love everybody. I have a really difficult task here because everything has been said, basically. And I certainly am not a scientist. And I don't have the figures here that are any different than what have been said already, but the -- I guess I can give my own experience. And I'll start with that and just see where we go.

The year, I think I've got this right, of Dr. Solomon's 86th was the first time that AIDS was found in India. Well, I was in New York in 1986, which is where I live. And I got a call from a friend of mine, who was working in New York, staying in a hotel uptown. And I picked up the phone, and he talked to me, and he broke down crying. And I asked him where he was, and I said I'll be up there in a few minutes. And I got into a cab and went up to his hotel. And he had just found

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12/3/02

out he was HIV positive. And in '86, that was a death sentence.

Six months, two months, a year, two years, who knew, but it was a death sentence. Well, my very dear close friend is still with us now. And he's healthy and he's working. And we have, I think ourselves collectively to thank for that. It's as if we cared enough to make this cause meaningful and powerful and effective.

The doctors with scientists, the healthcare workers, everyone who's been involved in this has done incredible things with the subject and with this terrible, terrible disease. I saw other friends who died, who couldn't even tell anyone that they were sick. They had leukemia. They had some other form of cancer. They had this, they had that. We all knew, but they could never even say that they were sick.

That's all changed quite a bit also. I think it has to do with a level of humanity, maybe that has entered this process, which I think is why so many different types of people have gotten involved with this AIDS question, because it touches so many things that are important to us. It touches human rights. It touches spirituality. It touches the basic connectedness of all of us. And to deal with this disease is to feel that inside of us.

I know, Mathilde, you're extraordinary what you've done. And I see these doctors here in the front row, the

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commitment that you guys have had for -- well not Cole, but everybody else, the commitment you've had is extraordinary. And you can't do this because of the paycheck. You can't do it because, I don't know, you get an award at the end of the day or something. You do it because it touches your heart and you can't do anything else.

And the feeling that comes from caring at this level changes the motivation, changes what you're capable of doing, makes it possible to literally change the universe. And in this case, it's the vehicle of AIDS, because we're able to touch each other in ways that maybe we weren't able to touch each other before, literally weren't able to touch each other before.

It's a very powerful thing. I feel myself transformed in the process of the friends of mine who are still alive and the friends who have died, living through that with them has transformed me in ways my spiritual practice hasn't. They're not separate, but it made it real. Spiritual practice, where you really embrace the other as yourself. Your pain is my pain. That's what this pandemic is doing for all of us who have been involved with this a long time. There's no difference anymore. And the colors go away. The races go away. The languages go away. And we're all brothers and sisters in this.

Now obviously, we went through this really horrific

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time where we made a lot of mistakes in this country. And a lot of people died when they didn't have to. But one thing we had going for us here was that it struck a very powerful group of Americans first, the gay community, who wouldn't stay down. And they made a noise. And they were powerful. And they made all of us pay attention. They made governments pay attention. They made the media pay attention. What we don't have in India is a similar case with a group who is powerful, that this has struck. It's first with the expendables, who don't have any power. It's with the sex workers. It's with the illiterates. It's with intravenous drug users.

And in a country like India has extraordinary problems, they are expendable, unfortunately. Now I still don't quite understand why this doesn't touch the heart of an India. In all the times that I have been in India, I don't understand why it doesn't really get to them, that these are your brothers and sisters. There's a disconnect there. And I haven't been able to penetrate that. And I'm saddened by that. And I'm kind of amazed, in a way, that that is even possible in such a spiritual country, but it is fact.

There was a moment about four years ago, where I saw what was going to happen. I read the reports. I talked to my friends. I could see what was going to happen in India. And I felt it was important to do something. And the awareness level was so small, it was the beginning, beginning of an awareness

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12/3/02

curve, an education curve. It was -- there were like in 1982 for us. And obviously, I didn't want to see them go through the same process we had, where 10 years, 15 years ago, goes by before anything positive happens.

And so, in any event, we created a few events, media events in Delhi and in Bombay, which were very effective on that level. There's a lot of attention. We had a lot of Bollywood movie stars and musicians and politicians and celebrity types with, you know, designers and etcetera. And big deal. Both of these events, back to back. Enormous attention. Front page and everything, blah, blah, blah. A couple years go by. Nothing has changed, nothing.

No one picked up on it. The government didn't pick up on it. There was no more money coming in. There were no more clinics started. The ones that were there weren't getting any larger than they were before. So astonished at that, I started to look around and say, "Well, what can we do here? We need model programs." From the first events, I had become connected to the NAS Foundation, which was per the introduction, it was a first care home for AIDS patients. And is now -- that's probably only a handful. Doctor, how many would there be now in India?

Yeah, live in situations? Four or five in the entire country. And the NAS Foundation has maybe 20 beds to live in. I don't know how many you have to live in. 24. So -- mm-hmm,

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12/3/02

they do the same there, but it's still astonishing to me that there's 20 beds. And you probably have the biggest one in India. 20 beds in NAS. live in AIDS patients. This is astonishing to me. The country that is so bright, so capable, such massive resources that can be harnessed there, but it's never touched them somehow. Somehow it just doesn't get there. And I look around the room here, I see a room of people who are not dislike the people that I spoke to in Bangalore last year. There was a group called the -- what was it called? Young Presidents Organization? YPO, Young Presidents Associations, which is a -- you have to be under 40 and you have to be a millionaire.

So you'd think these are highly educated, which they were, highly effective, which they were, highly rich, which they were. And I was going down to speak to them sensibly about Tibet. And when I got there, a little click happened in my heart. And I said there are six million Tibetans. There are about 100,000 living in India right now. There are one billion Indians. They're facing a situation where 20 to 25 million Indians may die. Let's talk about that. So I change the whole program and start talking about AIDS. And I got quite emotional about it.

And as I looked into the eyes of these really effective Indian people, who in some level had become friends of mine in that short period. There was no click. There was no click in

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12/3/02

the heart. It just didn't happen. Do you agree? No, same thing, same thing. As soon as I left, it was I never heard from them again and they didn't return the phone calls. So -- but this is typical of India. You know, so as a follow-up to that, I've been working some more with the Elizabeth Glaser Foundation Pediatric AIDS and became closer to their situation, although I'd done some things with them over the years and helped them promote into the events which were very effective.

They've raised I think it's \$33 million over this amount of time. They certainly have been instrumental in designing the strategies and protocols there that are helping in the mother to child transmission. And I said, "Let's do a pediatric AIDS event in Bombay." And I said considering what the morays and the difficulty in talking about sex is there, let's talk about children. And maybe we can under the radar.

And we partnered up with a friend who was -- comes out of very high level of industry there. Promesh [so] Federish [sp], who became our close partner. And we put this event together, which was going to be December 20 in Bombay. And it'll be the first time pediatric AIDS event has been international, outside of the U.S. The model works. It works for several reasons.

One, it does go under the radar. It's about kids. Now maybe that's a way to touch the Indian soul. We'll find out. The object is not even going to be raise money. Again, it's

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12/3/02

awareness. It's education. It's so far down on this curve.

And for good reason, because most of them don't know anyone who's sick. They might have heard about someone, but it's not a phase like it was to us. The prevalence now is below one percent. I think the numbers we're using is .7 percent.

It's quite low and manageable from their point of view. But obviously, they're not learning from what's happened in the rest of the world. They don't see where it's going. It's very hard for them to embrace that. Talking to some of the clinicians in Cornophagus [sp] state, it was -- his numbers were two percent of pregnant women, who are HIV positive, which in a one billion population is a huge amount, huge, massive.

You make the geometric curve on that number, then you get up to 20, 25 million very, very quickly. So it's been our job to -- and I know doctors been yours and I know it's been Angelie's [sp], and NAS and Shuba [sp], I know it's been yours to shakek everyone, and say, look, this is what's going to happen. Now the unfortunate thing with this kind of work also in India is they have all these other problems, which is what the YPO said to me. Well, why do you care about this? We have hepatitis. We have tuberculosis. We have this, we have that. Of course, it's a different situation. It's incurable and it's a geometric progression. It will destroy the country. We have a different rhetoric today. You know, we started the discussion this morning as a security threat.

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12/3/02

Now this started, what, about two months ago? Was -- that's the new vocabulary now. We don't talk about compassion too much. We're talking about security threat. Now if that's a way to get in the door, that's a valid door also, but it's not going to get you very far. The security threat can be dealt with piecemeal, but ultimately it's not going to save us. It's not going to save them. It's about a serious heart motivation here.

And when that serious heart motivation clicks in, you achieve things way beyond what you set out to do. You not only fix your security problem, you make friends everywhere. You transform the world around you. You see the world around you. You give health services to the world around you. There was a very curious thing that the Castro did. And how has this man stayed in power all this time? Who knows? He's got a health system.

But what he did that was more important than that even, is he offered free education to anyone who wanted to come to Havana. Anyone in Latin America who wanted to come, he gave them a college education. Now how is that cost effective? Extraordinary. If the U.S. did that, we'll give free college education to anyone in the world. How cost effective would that be about security? We'd have friends, educated friends, who are not afraid of us, but actually like us because they understand this. And we always like people we get to know.

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12/3/02

There was a moment in putting this event together in Bombay, where I probably shouldn't tell this story, but I will anyway about Palmesh [sp], where we started off very well. And the first bank we talked to gave a serious donation right from the beginning. And then Palmesh [sp] went to her friends who were high industry people. And she felt very confident and optimistic, sent out her letters, talked to everyone. She got negative responses from everyone. Even in this climate now, Gates was there. Front page news all the time in India. Nothing.

We're essentially sponsoring it ourselves, this event. The job that I feel that I can do is I'm not a scientist, obviously, and I can't give you the figures any better than anyone else. I can help get you that attention that you need. That's why I'm here right now, obviously. But there are other celebrities who can do that, too. And you know, what Mathilde has done over the years extraordinarily well of getting committed people, but people who could help in terms of media and use its celebrity in a positive way. It's incredibly important. Doctors can't do it on their own. They have to do other things well.

And usually, as human beings are, we do things really well only in one area. So we have to make this mix where we have doctors, obviously, healthcare workers, governmental people, the media, industry and celebrities working together.

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Now as we were talking before, I think one of the greatest partners that we can have in this kind of endeavor is the media. The media has to understand that they have a responsibility in this situation, that when we do an event that has celebrities associated with it, that has hardcore doctors that know what they're talking about, that it's dealt with in a serious way, that they're responsible, and seeing that they can change their country. They can change the world. They can save millions of lives in partnership with healthcare workers with the government with the rest of us who are trying to do this kind of work. And the truth is none of us can do it on our own. It's impossible.

You know, I remember something that Elizabeth Taylor said first time I heard her speak on the subject, which is "We can beat this together." Together. And you don't have to bring a lot of yourself a together experience. You know, a lot of little bits together make a really big thing with a lot of energy from all the little bits available. You know, from the 10 cents per \$100 that we were talking about before. That makes many trillions of dollars that dime per \$100 gross national product.

Again, responsibility, universal responsibility, motivation in the largest possible sense, giving ourselves what we can give, and giving it truthfully, honestly, fully, for whatever that is we can give. And we can beat this thing. We

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Guest Speakers: Richard Gere and Kenneth Cole

12/3/02

can beat it together. We can love each other. We can be true brothers and sisters in this. And I look around the room here. I mean, it's preaching to the choir. I mean, it's like everyone here is here for that reason ultimately. And if you want to save each other, you know, see the good doctors over here. The good doctors over here are the kind -- the academicians here, the kids, the media. The idea here is to save hundreds of millions of lives over the next 10, 20 years and beat this thing.

And what that will do us as a global community is way beyond killing this one disease. And that's my interest here. And I'd love to walk that road with every one of you. Thank you very much.

[applause]

I was supposed to give a warning when I was going to finish, but I didn't know. Okay, we're going to do this now? I don't have my little speech here, but Kenneth? Basically, I'm going to introduce you to a guy who's been around this a long time. It was '85 when you started, right? '85. You look much older than that. Yeah, Ken, sit down, I'm going to talk about you.

Now it's my great pleasure to introduce a man who truly needs no introduction, Kenneth Cole. Long known for his commitment to social issues, Kenneth was the very first to promote AIDS awareness through corporate advertising, taking a

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stand on this issue long before it became fashionable. His involvement with amfAR dates back to 1987. And he and his company, Kenneth Cole Productions, have created and donated a series of provocative ad campaigns to focus public attention on the threat HIV poses, and the need for continued research.

Today that we have the privilege of seeing the brand new campaign that he's done for amfAR. Describe it. Kenneth?

[applause]

I just met him and I'm really proud to have.

KENNETH COLE: Actually, I was at -- I've been frequenting these annual World AIDS Day gatherings for some time. And I wasn't really -- it's hard to really quantify how long a time it was. And then I said, Richard, before and I says, you know, I actually saw you at one of these events a few years ago, three years ago, four years ago. When was it?

RICHARD GERE: Well, I haven't worked worked on one of these 10 years.

KENNETH COLE: Richard's been part of things, as everybody knows, but -- I haven't -- so I didn't realize how long it's been, but it's been a long journey. And I got involved really, just real briefly, actually it was 1985. I did my first public awareness campaign because AIDS to me then, it just was this very simplistic threshold. We didn't know how to cure it, but we knew how to contain it. It was very simple. We knew it then, we know it now. So tell people what they have

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12/3/02

to do. That's what distinguishes the human species from others is that we will always defend ourselves unchallenged. And so tell them what they have to do, and they will. This is simple stuff.

So I'm going to it, and maybe we'll accomplish a little bit. And then we'll see where it takes us, but it can only take us in the right direction. So we did this. And this is 1985. And clearly, I was naive because as you guys have well learned, and you all know better than I maybe that not that much has changed. And then we ran a campaign in 1989 because it -- so we know that it's all about human behavior. We've got to change a few things.

So it's intravenous drug -- intravenous needles and it's condoms. That's the first hurdle, easy. So condoms are easy. We all know how to do them. They're out there, they're legal, but the problem is you can't advertise condoms are legal. So we said well, let's try anyway. So we took a condom, we took the label, air brushed the label off of the condom, and we ran a full page ad in a dozen magazines, thinking well you know, it's no really an ad because there's no product. It's a generic thing. Looks like a graduation hat.

And we ran it with a copy that said, "Shoes aren't the only thing we encourage you to wear." And no one said anything. And this was back in 1989. But not that much has changed. So it's very frustrating in a sense. And I also --

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12/3/02

every once and a while, get fatigued. And I get that same call from Dr. Kramer and I get back to work. But it's been a long tiresome journey, because really not that much has changed.

And our message over the years is to be aware as more important to what you wear. And we've continue to disseminate various messages. And we've done it with amfAR. And I continue to stay very much involved as a board member since 1987.

And we all know that this new statistic is staggering, the 42 million people are living with HIV. And the 14,000 people are contracting HIV every day. We ran an ad last spring. It was right after 9/11. And I think amfAR wasn't all that embracing of the concept, but the message was on -- and we talked about every -- the good that came of 9/11, because we did -- it transformed all of us in a lot of ways. And we began much more human and much more vulnerable, but we accepted our vulnerability. We understood a little bit more about who we were, but a lot of things didn't change. And the ads basically said -- a series of ads.

On 9/12, cab drivers waved at each other with all five fingers. It was a series of messages. And then one of them was on 9/12, 14,000 people still contracted HIV. Not much clearly that the implication there is not that much has changed.

So but 42 million living with HIV and only as much as

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one million people are being treated. So it's just staggering statistic. So that being said, this new campaign that we created, we put together very quickly. We'll show you, which will appear. It's about \$3 million worth of outdoor media. It'll appear on buses and outdoor vehicles in 20 plus major markets around the country, compliments, by the way, of Viacom Outdoors, which is friends of ours and has been sponsoring this for a long time.

One million people with -- for HIV, only 41 million to go, amfAR.

[applause]

MALE SPEAKER: Thank you, Richard. Thank you, Kenneth.

Tough act to follow. Where did the photographers go?

[laughter]

[END TAPE]