



XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008)
Closing Session Remarks
Dr. Julio Montaner
President, International AIDS Society 2008-2010

Colleagues, friends and distinguished guests; colegas, amigos y distinguidos invitados: I am Julio Montaner, Director of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver, Canada. I am honored to stand in front of you today, as the incoming President of the International AIDS Society, as we close the XVII International AIDS Conference, the first International AIDS Conference to be held in Latin America.

This is particularly meaningful for me. I am originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I spent most of my formative years. I also have a longstanding and fruitful collaboration with a number of friends and colleagues throughout this part of the world.

Latin America has often been neglected in the context of the global AIDS crisis. Early returns clearly indicate that the decision to hold the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico has gone a long way to ameliorate this. For that, I thank you all on behalf of the Hermanos Latino Americanos.

Next, I would like to take a moment to pay my respect to all of our delegates, who made this Conference a vibrant success.

You came from every corner of the world – bringing with you distinct and valuable insights and perspectives, which truly enhanced our collective experience. You have made this the second largest International AIDS Conference, and the largest health-related summit ever conducted in the south of the world. What a fantastic achievement!

I am proud to note that over 50 percent of the delegates at this conference have never before attended an international AIDS Conference. Further, we sponsored over 2500 delegates from 95 countries.

These carefully selected delegates have made a commitment to return home to actively disseminate the newly acquired knowledge, as part of a concerted strategy to reach every corner of the world.

Together, they represent the new generation that will pick up the fight against HIV. We welcome you with open arms!

We are similarly in debt to the members of the media who joined us in Mexico. They have worked tirelessly to cover all aspects of the conference. Their work represents a fundamental piece of the puzzle, that provides effective and timely knowledge translation of our proceedings. Thanks to their efforts, our messages have echoed throughout the world and we thank you for that!



I would like to personally congratulate our outgoing President, my good friend and a true visionary Dr Pedro Cahn, who together with Dr. Luis Soto Ramirez provided us with the outstanding leadership and commitment of excellence that this conference has demonstrated. However, they could have never accomplished so much if it wasn't for the cooperation of a large number of people and organizations. In that context, I want to recognize the key contribution of the Conference co-organizers and of course very much in particular the incredibly diligent and dedicated IAS staff both in Geneva and Mexico. To you, thank you from all my heart.

I want to also specifically highlight the contribution of people living with HIV in all aspects of the planning and execution of the Conference - as volunteers, as speakers, as delegates, as journalists and also as committee members. The IAS is strongly committed to the Greater Involvement of People living with HIV/AIDS as described by the GIPA principle. Our Conference is indeed a living testimony to that commitment.

Over the last week, we had the unique opportunity to hear the best and the latest in the field. I was extremely impressed by the quality of the presentations, and the enthusiastic debate that often continued beyond the walls of the conference centre. I was delighted to see so many wonderful presentations given by a new generation of highly committed participants. Their youth and enthusiasm invigorates us and also reassures us that there is a generation ready to carry on the fight against this devastating epidemic.

Dear friends, as we conclude our Mexico Conference it is clear that a successful preventive vaccine remains elusive. Yet, we must not despair, the research in that regard must continue.

However, the road ahead is clear. We have the tools today to effectively control the pandemic.

The key word emerging from this conference is **combination**.

- Combination prevention strategies tailored to decrease HIV transmission.
- Combination antiretroviral therapy to dramatically reduce morbidity and mortality among those infected worldwide.
- Combination antiretroviral therapy to also reduce community viral load as an aid to prevention.
- Combination strategies to enhance HIV testing.
- Combination strategies to reduce poverty, homelessness and discrimination.

I am delighted to note, as pointed out by Marco Vittoria earlier this morning and I already stressed to a number of the speakers, that this week in Mexico we have finally witnessed the marriage of treatment and prevention! Let's hope this is a long lasting and successful marriage.



We find ourselves at a critical juncture in the summer of 2008. Over the previous three decades, we have collectively accumulated a tremendous amount of knowledge regarding what needs to be done to effectively combat HIV at the individual and societal levels. Yet, implementation flounders.

We must work most diligently to overcome the ever-growing implementation gap. We must recruit, if not coerce, the international political leadership to achieve this goal.

We must keep the pressure on the G8 leaders to follow up on their commitment to achieve universal access to prevention, care and treatment by 2010.

Let's be perfectly clear: failure to enact a comprehensive, sustained and multi-pronged attack on the pandemic represents a crime - a crime against those infected, a crime against those affected, and a crime against those susceptible. Indeed, it represents a crime against humanity.

Earlier last week, UNAIDS released the 2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic. This was received with some degree of enthusiasm.

The new report points out that there are now 33 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide against a previous estimate of 40 million. Hardly a victory, I would say!

A full 2.7 million people were newly infected with HIV last year. Yes, that is down from the 3 million in 2001, but this still represents a huge number, an unacceptable number, of new infections!

Two million people died from AIDS in 2007, yes, down from 2.2 million at the peak in 2005. Still 2 million too many!

The number of children infected with HIV/AIDS fell to 370,000 in 2007 from 410,000 in 2005. Hardly a victory, when optimal use of Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy should be able to eradicate neonatal HIV infection!

In that context, 33 per cent of pregnant HIV-positive women now receive drugs to prevent vertical HIV transmission, up from 14 per cent two years ago. Still, only 33%. That is shameful!

Over 3 million people in resource-limited settings are now on antiretrovirals, an increase of one million in the past year alone. Yes, this is a substantial progress, however, we are still playing catch up, and we are falling further behind every minute that goes by: there are 5 new infections for every 2 people starting antiretroviral therapy. This is unacceptable!

The thousands of men, women and children, becoming infected and dying every day are the victims of our inability to transform knowledge into action.

We know what needs to be done. We must strive for universal action now! Anything less would be a crime!



And, yes, there is hope. Last week we heard plans to reinstate PEPFAR funding for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria to the amount of 48 billion. Despite lingering concerns regarding the strings attached to this pledge by the current administration, I would like to thank the American people. You should be applauded for this tremendous commitment. Thank you very much!

However, this responsibility cannot lie solely on the shoulders of the American people! The world must follow their example. Ultimately, if George W. Bush got it, the rest of the G8 leaders must get it, too!

Let me be clear, I call upon Prime Minister, Stephen Harper from Canada, along with the rest of the G8 leaders, to match President Bush's contribution, now! And we want no strings attached! We want the contribution to be sustainable and long term.

Let me also stress: there can be no end to the pandemic unless we secure full protection of human rights for those most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The rights of sex trade workers, injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, aboriginals, and women, as well as girls must be protected through legal and policy reform in every country around the world and now. Unfortunately, we are a long in this regard.

Let's call on all political and religious leaders to make this a reality, now!

I would also like to address a recent announcement by the United States to lift the travel ban for those living with HIV/AIDS. As you know, this has been a top priority for the IAS for many years.

We are delighted to hear the news. Once this legislation is past, we will begin the process to bring the International AIDS Conference back to the United States. I look forward to having the ban lifted during my tenure!

Dear friends, once again, I am honored to stand here today as the new President of the International AIDS Society. I want to sincerely thank the Governing Council for their trust as they provided me with this opportunity to serve you, our members.

I look forward to working with my good friends Pedro Cahn, our esteemed Past-President; Elly Katabira, our President-Elect, and the future first African President of the International AIDS Society; along with the members of the Governing Council, and our highly-skilled staff, led by Craig McClure, our superb Executive Director in Geneva, and you, of course, the IAS membership, to ensure that we continue to play a central role in the shaping of the fight against this devastating pandemic.

Thank you, I look forward to seeing you in Vienna in 2010. Safe travels! Que tengan un muy buen viaje! Adios!