

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at George Washington University

December 1, 2011

Well, thank you, Sanjay. It is an honor to be with you today and to follow President Kikwete and President Bush. To Bono and Alicia, to the ONE campaign, thank you for bringing us together. Because of your work, all across Africa there are children who are no longer starving, mothers who are no longer dying of treatable diseases, fathers who are again providing for their families. And because of all of you, so many people are now blessed with hope.

We've got Members of Congress who have done so much for this cause who are here today, and we want to thank them. Let me also thank President Bush for joining us from Tanzania and for his bold leadership on this issue. I believe that history will record the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief as one of his greatest legacies. And that program, more ambitious than even the leading advocates thought was possible at the time, has saved thousands and thousands and thousands of lives and spurred international action and laid the foundation for a comprehensive global plan that will impact the lives of millions. And we are proud that we have the opportunity to carry that work forward.

Today is a remarkable day. Today we come together as a global community, across continents, across faiths and cultures, to renew our commitment to ending the AIDS pandemic once and for all.

Now, if you go back and you look at the themes of past World AIDS Days, if you read them one after another, you'll see the story of how the human race has confronted one of the most devastating pandemics in our history. You'll see that in those early years, when we started losing good men and women to a disease that no one truly understood, it was about ringing the alarm, calling for global action, proving that this deadly disease was not isolated to one area or one group of people.

And that's part of what makes today so remarkable, because back in those early years, few could have imagined this day, that we would be looking ahead to the beginning of the end, marking a World AIDS Day that has gone from that early beginning when people were still uncertain to now a theme: "Getting to Zero." Few could have imagined that we'd be talking about the real possibility of an AIDS-free generation. But that's what we're talking about. That's why we're here. And we arrived here because of all of you and your unwavering belief that we can, and we will, beat this disease.

Because we invested in antiretroviral treatment, people who would have died, some of whom are here today, are living full and vibrant lives. Because we developed new tools, more and more mothers are giving birth to children free from this disease. And because of a persistent focus on awareness, the global rate of new infections and deaths is declining.

So make no mistake, we are going to win this fight. But the fight is not over, not by a long shot. The rate of new infections may be going down elsewhere, but it's not going down here in America. The infection rate here has been holding steady for over a decade. There are communities in this country being devastated still by this disease.

When new infections among young black gay men increase by nearly 50 percent in 3 years, we need to do more to show them that their lives matter. When Latinos are dying sooner

than other groups and when black women feel forgotten, even though they account for most of the new cases among women, then we've got to do more.

So this fight is not over. Not for the 1.2 million Americans who are living with HIV right now. Not for the Americans who are infected every day. This fight is not over for them, it's not over for their families, and as a consequence, it can't be over for anybody in this room, and it certainly isn't over for your President.

Since I took office, we've had a robust national dialogue on HIV/AIDS. Members of my administration have fanned out across the country to meet people living with HIV, to meet researchers, faith leaders, medical providers, and private sector partners. We've spoken to over 4,000 people. And out of all those conversations, we drafted a new plan to combat this disease. Last year, we released that plan, our first-ever national HIV/AIDS strategy.

We went back to basics: prevention, treatment, and focusing our efforts where the need is greatest. And we laid out a vision where every American, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socioeconomic status, can get access to life-extending care.

And I want to be clear about something else: Since taking office, we've increased overall funding to combat HIV/AIDS to record levels. With bipartisan support, we reauthorized the Ryan White Care Act. And as I signed that bill, I was so proud to also announce that my administration was ending the ban that prohibited people with HIV from entering America. Because of that step, next year, for the first time in two decades, we will host the International AIDS Conference.

So we've done a lot over the past 3 years, but we can do so much more. Today I'm announcing some new commitments. We're committing an additional \$15 million for the Ryan White program that supports care provided by HIV medical clinics across the country. We want to keep those doors open so they can keep saving lives. We're committing an additional \$35 million for State AIDS-drug assistance programs.

The Federal Government can't do this alone, so I'm also calling on State governments and pharmaceutical companies and private foundations to do their part to help Americans get access to all the lifesaving treatments.

This is a global fight, and it's one that America must continue to lead. In looking back at the history of HIV/AIDS, you'll see that no other country has done more than this country, and that's testament to our leadership as a country. But we can't be complacent.

I think this is an area where we can also look back and take pride that both Republicans and Democrats in Congress have consistently come together to fund this fight, not just here, but around the world. And that's a testament to the values that we share as Americans, a commitment that extends across party lines, that's demonstrated by the fact that President Bush, President Clinton, and I are joining you all today.

Since I took office, we've increased support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We've launched a Global Health Initiative that has improved access to health care, helping bring down the cost of vaccines, and over the next 5 years, will help save the lives of 4 million more children. And all along, we kept focusing on expanding our impact.

Today I'm proud to announce that as of September, the United States now supports antiretroviral treatment for nearly 4 million people worldwide—4 million people. And in just the past year, we've provided 600,000 HIV-positive mothers with access to drugs so that

200,000 babies could be born HIV-free. And nearly 13 million people have received care and treatment, including more than 4 million children. So we've got some stuff to be proud of.

But we've got to do more. We're achieving these results not by acting alone, but by partnering with developing countries like Tanzania and with leaders like President Kikwete.

Now as we go forward, we've got to keep refining our strategy so that we're saving as many lives as possible. We need to listen when the scientific community focuses on prevention. That's why, as a matter of policy, we're now investing in what works, from medical procedures to promoting healthy behavior.

And that's why we're setting a goal of providing antiretroviral drugs to more than 1½ million HIV-positive pregnant women over the next 2 years so that they have the chance to give birth to HIV-free babies.

We're not going to stop there. We know that treatment is also prevention. And today we're setting a new target of helping 6 million people get treatment by the end of 2013. So that's 2 million more people than our original goal.

And on this World AIDS Day, here's my message to everybody who is out there: To the global community, we ask you to join us. Countries that have committed to the Global Fund need to give the money that they promised. Countries that haven't made a pledge, they need to do so. That includes countries that in the past might have been recipients, but now are in a position to step up as major donors. China and other major economies are in a position now to transition in a way that can help more people.

To Congress, keep working together and keep the commitments you've made intact. At a time when so much in Washington divides us, the fight against this disease has united us across parties and across Presidents. And it shows that we can do big things when Republicans and Democrats put their common humanity before politics. So we need to carry that spirit forward.

And to all Americans, we've got to keep fighting. Fight for every person who needs our help today, but also fight for every person who didn't live to see this moment, for the Rock Hudsons and the Arthur Ashes and every person who woke us up to the reality of HIV/AIDS. We've got to fight for Ryan White and his mother Jeanne and the Ray brothers and every person who forced us to confront our destructive prejudices and our misguided fears. Fight for Magic Johnson and Mary Fisher and every man, woman, and child, who, when told they were going to die from this disease, they said: "No, we're not. We're going to live."

Keep fighting for all of them because we can end this pandemic. We can beat this disease. We can win this fight. We just have to keep at it, steady, persistent: today, tomorrow, every day until we get to zero. And as long as I have the honor of being your President, that's what this administration is going to keep doing. That's my pledge. That's my commitment to all of you. And that's got to be our promise to each other, because we've come so far and we've saved so many lives, we might as well finish the fight.

Thank you for all you've done. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:27 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Sanjay Gupta, chief medical correspondent, CNN, who introduced the President; former President George W. Bush; musicians Paul D. "Bono" Hewson and Alicia Keys; Jeanne White-Ginder, mother of Ryan White, who died of AIDS in 1990; Randy Ray, whose brothers Ricky and Robert Ray

died of AIDS in 1992 and 2000, respectively; Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Jr., former player, National Basketball Association; and HIV/AIDS activist Mary Fisher.

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