

PRESS RELEASE

Bipartisan support symbolizes shared responsibility and collective solidarity to end AIDS

US Congress hosts bipartisan briefing “Together we will end AIDS” with Congressional leaders from both political parties and leaders to discuss ways to invest smartly in the AIDS response and explore opportunities ahead

WASHINGTON, DC/GENEVA, 24 July 2012—Senators Patrick Leahy and Lindsey Graham, Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, today hosted a briefing to find ways of maximizing new opportunities to respond to HIV. Moderated by Ms. Gwen Ifil of Washington Week & PBS NewsHour, the meeting brought together members of both the Republican and Democratic parties, as well as leading figures in the response to AIDS—who offered their contributions on how they can help make the response to HIV faster, smarter and better.

“With bipartisan support we are going to take the issue out of politics and strengthen families and communities,” said Senator Leahy.

Joining the Senators were the Chairwoman and Ranking Member of the House State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, Representatives Kay Granger and Nita Lowey.

“We have to be targeted, we have to be smart and we have to use these resources as effectively as possible,” said Representative Granger.

In 2011, the United States invested more than US\$ 4.5 billion to the AIDS response in low- and middle-income countries. The global amount needed by 2015 is estimated to be between US\$ 22-24 billion. If investments remain at current levels, the shortfall will be around US\$ 7 billion.

“What America has done for itself has made it strong. What America has done for others has made it great,” said Sir Elton John, in his role as a philanthropist and humanitarian. “Your support for PEPFAR has saved millions and millions of lives. Please do not take your foot off the accelerator!”

Sir Elton and UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé helped convene the meeting and welcomed His Excellency Mr Kgalema Petrus Motlanthe, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, and several former African Heads of State to the briefing.

“In South Africa we have committed to getting to zero,” said Deputy President Motlanthe. “We have expanded services—we set ourselves a target of providing HIV counselling and testing to 12 million people. We have actually succeeded in testing 20 million people for HIV and other health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure so that they could be referred and given support.”

Many low- and middle-income countries are stepping up domestic investments to fill the investment gap. South Africa, which funds more than 80% of its AIDS response domestically, invested nearly US\$ 2 billion in 2011.

Speaking on the role of faith based organizations and the private sector Dr. Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church, and Mr. John Megrue, President of the Business Leadership Council for a Generation Born HIV Free, offered increased support from the two pivotal sectors.

Florence Ngobeni-Allen, an Ambassador for the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, thanked the American and South African governments, telling the more than 200 guests that she was a beneficiary of coordinated support, “I lived it. I walked it.” Ms Ngobeni learned of her HIV status 16 years ago after losing her child to the virus. Now, a mother of two HIV negative boys, she urged the group to continue its work. “Without your dedication and leadership, both here and in my home country of South Africa, the lifesaving services I’ve personally received, and that I have had the opportunity to share with other women like me, would be unavailable,” she said.

“As we have seen today, HIV is unique in the way that it evokes passion and mobilizes people around a common goal—ending the epidemic,” said Mr Sidibé. “We must build on this momentum and energy to drive it forward.”

The briefing was held in Washington, DC where the 19th International AIDS Conference is taking place. It is being held in the United States for the first time in more than 20 years.

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