

Talking Points for Bill Gates
UN Media Leaders Summit on HIV/AIDS
January 15, 2004
8-10 minute remarks

Good afternoon. It is an honor to join you here today and to witness the formation of a new partnership between the world's governing body, many of the world's leading media organizations and the Kaiser Foundation.

I hope to do three things today: explain why I believe the media's role in increasing visibility for HIV/AIDS is so important, why I'm optimistic about the opportunities ahead, and what I believe is needed to stop this epidemic.

I. The media's role is important.

The media have played a crucial role in highlighting the most important issues of our time—civil rights, apartheid, political oppression. Yet HIV/AIDS may be the greatest challenge of all. You have played a remarkable role already. In fact, the media had a great influence on my own commitment to fight diseases in the developing world.

Early on, when my wife, Melinda, and I were thinking about our philanthropy and how we could have the greatest impact with our resources, my father sent me a clip from a newspaper about preventable deaths in poor countries. I remember reading a chart that listed the world's deadliest diseases. One disease I had never even heard of—rotavirus—was killing literally half a million kids each year. I thought: *That can't be true, that's got to be a typo*. If a single disease was killing that many kids, we would have heard about it—it'd be front-page news. But it isn't.

As Melinda and I have become more engaged in global health issues over the past decade, one thing has become clear: not enough is being done about the millions of preventable deaths each year from diseases like AIDS or malaria. In part, that's because *people aren't aware of what is happening*. We don't see these issues covered enough in newspapers, radio and television.

People need to see the problems up close, to act. Imagine if you could randomly rearrange the world so that people in the rich world were living next to those from developing nations:

If I walked through my neighborhood, and learned that my neighbor across the street died from TB... and saw the kids at the playground were sick and dying from malaria... I'd want to do anything I could to help. And I think that if *other* people knew the toll these diseases were taking and *understood* that we know how to slow or even *stop* these epidemics, they too would want to do much more to help.

That is why raising the visibility of these issues and passing on accurate health messages are so incredibly important.

You are vital in the fight against AIDS for three reasons:

1. **Attention.** You have the power to bring greater attention, action, and co-operation from government leaders.
2. **Stigma.** You can eradicate the paralyzing stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS by providing accurate information and humanizing media coverage.
3. **Information.** Even the *best, most compelling* data of scientists and health experts reaches a *limited* audience. You deliver practical, life-saving information to people in the hardest-hit areas that will help them protect themselves and connect with social services.
 - Television and radio reach 90% of China's 1.25 billion people¹. One single drama centered on AIDS and broadcast on CCTV reached 40 million viewers².
 - Since 1998, MTV has raised awareness through concerts and public service announcements surrounding World AIDS Day. Last year's concert was seen by hundreds of millions of people.³

Informing the public about AIDS and other global-health issues is saving lives. Evidence shows⁴ that no public-health campaign succeeds without engaging the public.

- Uganda and Thailand—both of which have contained AIDS epidemics in their countries—recognized early on the importance of public awareness by initiating aggressive media campaigns using print, radio and billboards.

II. Why I'm optimistic.

No one can deny the magnitude of HIV/AIDS as a news story. As Bono says, this is the issue that our great-grandchildren will judge us by. They will ask: *What did you do to stop AIDS?*

The media have made some very good efforts so far:

- **Kaiser/Viacom.** We are pleased to support KNOW HIV/AIDS, a media campaign you've learned about today that was developed by Viacom and the Kaiser Family

¹ UNAIDS, "Join the Fight Against AIDS in China", Illustrative Menu of Partnership Options, section on mass media.

http://www.unaids.org/en/other/functionalities/ViewDocument.asp?href=http%3a%2f%2fgva-doc-owl%2fWEBcontent%2fDocuments%2fpub%2fTopics%2fPartnership-Menus%2fPDF%2fCHINAMedia_en%26%2346%3bpdf

² Kaiser Family Foundation 1/15 UN event briefing materials, 2004

³ UNAIDS press release about Nov. 29, 2003 Staying Alive concert in Cape Town

http://www.unaids.org/en/other/functionalities/ViewDocument.asp?href=http%3a%2f%2fgva-doc-owl%2fWEBcontent%2fDocuments%2fpub%2fMedia%2fPress-Releases01%2fPR_WAD_MTV_1Dec03_en%26%2346%3bpdf

⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development, What Happened in Uganda?: Declining HIV Prevalence, Behavior Change, and the National Response, 2003; UNAIDS, HIV Prevention Needs and Successes: a tale of three countries, An update on HIV prevention success in Senegal, Thailand and Uganda, UNAIDS Best Practice Collection, 2001

Foundation. KNOW HIV/AIDS is working in the U.S. and internationally to eliminate ignorance surrounding HIV.

- **BBC World Service Trust/India initiative.** In India, Doordarshan (the national TV network), the National AIDS Control Organisation and the BBC World Service Trust launched the country's first mass media campaign to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS. The campaign has been largely based on education through entertainment, including a popular detective series that reaches more than 100 million viewers.
- **Botswana government and CDC.** In Botswana, a national radio soap opera is informing the age group most at risk (14-49 year olds) and helping to change behavior. Twice a week, families listen as HIV-positive characters cope with the challenges and choices of daily life. The show was developed by the Botswana government and the Centers for Disease Control.

At our foundation, we're excited about the many partnerships—on both the scientific and the public-awareness fronts—that we've been forming to call attention to HIV/AIDS. Today's event is a great example of that.

I'd like to highlight a few other projects we're involved in. One project I'm enthusiastic about is supporting programs aimed at training journalists from developing countries about basic medicine and science behind diseases such as HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. Our goal is to improve the quantity *and the quality* of health stories to inform people, reduce stigma and generate action from government.

But I can't let this opportunity to speak with the world's media leaders go by without mentioning some of the scientific research and development we're working on with partners around the world.

- We're supporters of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB & Malaria, which thanks to the leadership of Kofi Annan has shown the world that a collaborative approach is essential.
- We are supporting work in Botswana, which has the world's highest rate of HIV infection, to provide treatment for those infected and prevention for those most at-risk.
- In India we support HIV-prevention efforts among groups most likely to contract and spread the virus.
- We are supporting research on a microbicide—because it is absolutely essential to develop a product that prevents HIV that a woman can control—and of course research on an AIDS vaccine, the best hope to end the epidemic.

III. What is needed.

Many of you are making new or increased commitments today. I, applaud your efforts, and look forward to hearing more about them.

As I said, I believe many people fail to take action against diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis because they can't see up close the devastation these diseases cause.

If people saw this, they would insist that something be done. As it stands now, the people who see the worst of it don't have the resources to defeat it, and those with the resources to defeat it don't see the worst of it.

Eighteen months ago, the Secretary General invited me to speak here at the United Nations and to present my thoughts on what is needed on a global level to stop this epidemic. I said then, and I still believe, that three critical things are needed.

1. **Visibility.** Keep up the pressure through media coverage. Spread the word throughout your newsrooms and media organizations that this is THE story--the most important story of our time.
2. **Information.** Second, we can't just tell people about the problems. We have to tell them about effective, affordable solutions—and about how little money it takes to save a life. You can partner with groups like Kaiser and the BBC Trust, who can provide you with the information and the support you need.
3. **Leadership.** The third critical element is leadership. Encourage your peers to do more. If every media company in the world took on HIV/AIDS, just think of the progress we could make.

Never has the need been greater. But the fact that we are all gathered here today demonstrates that there is reason to be hopeful.

This disease moves quickly—but so can we. The great attributes that you all bring to the response are the speed, reach, and influence of today's global media.

Thank you for your concern and your dedication to this global initiative against AIDS. Together we will accomplish great things.

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