

August 19, 2006 – Anonymity of AIDS, radiance of the Stars
By Harindra Singh Bagwara

Toronto (Canada)

Celebrated Hollywood star Richard Gere appealed to the well-known Bollywood actors to join the fight against AIDS. He observed that the kind of fanaticism for film stars in India is not seen anywhere else in the world. Given this, according to Gere, the Indian stars can prevail over the problem of AIDS. At the XVI World AIDS Conference, held in Toronto, Richard Gere said in India actors who are considered demi-gods, can help overcome the monster called AIDS by participating in the fight against it. Extending by two years the tenure of the Heroes Project, which Gere established to create awareness among the Indian masses against AIDS, Gere said, "I have been to India around 14 to 15 times in the past two years for the Heroes Project. The silver screen artists are ideal for the population here. In the South of India, where the HIV/AIDS prevalence is high, the appeal of the film actors is equally high. That's why we have attempted to rope in the South Indian actors with the Heroes Project. Today, more than 50 actors are trying to spread awareness among the people in Hyderabad alone". Richard Gere, who has starred in hits like 'Runaway Bride', 'Pretty Woman', 'American Gigolo', 'Shall We Dance' and 'Chicago', said that considering the massive population of India, if AIDS is not wiped out in time, it will create mayhem. That's why he has started a movement against AIDS with Star India, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Over the next two years, The Heroes Project will spend \$23.16 million India.

- ❖ "The kind of recognition Heroes Project has achieved in such a short time is commendable. Media & cinema should come together for the fight against AIDS".

– Sujata Rao, Project Director, National AIDS Control Organisation