

# US and Europe renege on AIDS pledges

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Pledges made by US president George W. Bush and European Union Commission president Romano Prodi to each provide \$1 billion for the global fight against AIDS were proved worthless last week.

A meeting in Paris on July 16 of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria ended with no new money being advanced to meet a massive cash shortfall.

The Global Fund was set up in 2002 and faces an estimated shortfall of at least \$400 million in its current spending. The Paris meeting confronted a 50 percent deficit for the third funding round, starting in October 2003, which needs between \$800 million and \$1 billion, while the fund currently has access to only about \$450 million.

Vuyiseka Dubula from the South African Treatment Action Campaign called the donors' meeting "a scandal."

"The wealthiest countries in the world are refusing the amounts of money needed in 2003 and 2004 to begin to save our lives," Dubula said following the second International AIDS Society conference in Paris.

Describing the impact that the funding shortfall will have on just one programme operated by France's Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders), Dr Nicolas Durier told the press, "If the necessary Global Fund money doesn't come through, up to 50,000 Malawians living with HIV/AIDS will be left to their own devices, without hope of their lives being extended."

In an article headlined "A Miserly Response to a Global Emergency," Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, wrote, "On Wednesday, while the rich countries gave their speeches and paraded their paltry generosity, AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria claimed the lives of another 15,000 Africans."

"The Bush administration has made tax cuts that

amount to about \$20 billion per month since taking office. It has somehow found about \$60 billion so far to fight the Iraq war and is spending \$3.9 billion each month to station troops in Iraq—an amount that would more than fully finance the Global Fund in 2004, and save millions of lives in the process," Sachs wrote.

According to Sachs, a White House official had told him Bush was bypassing the Global Fund because "the president did not believe in committing taxpayers' dollars to multilateral initiatives of which the US is not in charge."

Sachs notes, "In the first two-and-a-half years of the Bush presidency, only a handful of Africans have received combination antiretroviral therapy as a result of US bilateral programmes; meanwhile, 5 million Africans have died of the disease and another 30 million are currently infected."

Less than two months ago, Congress had authorised \$3 billion spending, with \$1 billion for the Global Fund, in an AIDS bill that Bush had signed and then touted as he travelled across Africa.

However, across the Atlantic, a letter from the White House was urging Congress to limit the total AIDS spending to just \$2 billion, with only \$200 million for the Global Fund.

Even as Bush posed before the cameras with AIDS victims on his Africa tour, the Republican majority on the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives duly cut back US spending on the global fight against AIDS from \$3 billion to \$2 billion for the fiscal year 2004.

"This is surely one of the darkest days in the history of the US response to global AIDS," Dr. Paul Zeitz, executive director of the Global AIDS Alliance told the press.

"Just as we feared, the \$3 billion turned out to be an empty promise to some of the most desperate people in the world, including millions of children," Zeitz said.

The duplicity of the Bush administration was made complete when Global Fund chairman Tommy Thompson, who is also US secretary of health and human services, told the Paris gathering he was he was fighting for the “full \$1 billion” for the Global Fund.

The Global Fund faces an even greater cash crisis in the medium term, with some \$10.5 billion required annually by 2005 just to keep up with the spread of AIDS in Africa, Asia and Russia.

A recent United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) report on global HIV/AIDS funding estimates that less than half the money will be available that would be needed to fight the epidemic in some of the world’s poorest countries.

According to Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS, “the mismatch between need and funding continues to be one of the biggest obstacles in the struggle to control the epidemic.”

UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate that more than \$10.5 billion a year will be needed in 2005 simply for a “barebones” package of prevention, treatment, care and support programmes in what they call “low and middle-income countries.” This alone would require a doubling of the 2003 spending levels. “By 2007, almost \$15 billion will be needed,” the report states.

The report estimates that spending will have to continue at this level for “at least a decade thereafter” if AIDS is to be successfully combated.



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