



**EMBARGOED: 3.15 PM, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup> 2009**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Address on World Aids Day  
The Luncheon Club, Surry Hills  
1 December 2009**

**Mr Martin Walsh**, President Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, **Ms Bev Lange** CEO Bobby Goldsmith Foundation; **Mr Mark Orr** President ACON, **Mr Nick Parkhill** CEO ACON, **Mr Jason Appleby** President Positive Life, **Mr Rob Lake** CEO Positive Life, **Mr Adrian Lovney** President AIDS Trust of Australia

Thank you for inviting me to join you today, here in this warm, welcoming space at the Luncheon Club, to add my voice and heart to the message of World AIDS Day.

I feel very proud, as Patron of the AIDS Trust of Australia, to recognise and celebrate the remarkable contribution of organisations here today: people who give selfless, compassionate, unjudging care; who have been for nearly three decades a beacon for Australians living with HIV/AIDS, and for those whom it has already claimed.

And can I make special mention of the tremendous contribution made by the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, as we mark its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. What a wonderful record of ongoing and unconditional support to thousands of people living with HIV.

My friends, I am in two minds today. On the one hand, I recount the figures and observe the trends in statistics – some of which are hopeful.

On the other, I can't help but think of the babies I saw in Africa, the orphans in their hundreds and thousands, the families and communities crippled.

Their faces and outstretched hands are in my thoughts today, and always in my heart.

The statistics will be familiar to some here, and are startling in their scale.

The number of people living with HIV worldwide now tops 33 million.

In the last year, 2 million died of AIDS related illness.

2.7 million were newly infected.

While the tolls are highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, in our own Asia Pacific region almost 5 million people are living with HIV/AIDS – about 16,500 here in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst our initial response to HIV/AIDS in Australia was robust and radical in many ways, the number of new cases of HIV infection has increased at an alarming rate over the past several years.

There can be no room for complacency. The situation we face in 2009 remains extremely serious.

Yet new data reveals a definite decline in the rates of infection. And we applaud the scientists who have developed a range of effective anti-retroviral therapies to treat HIV infection and greatly delay the onset of AIDS. Of course we are still a long way short of universal access to such treatments.

According to a joint report from the UN and the World Health Organisation, new HIV infections have been reduced by 17% over the past eight years.

Since the United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS was signed in 2001, the number of new infections in sub-Saharan Africa is 15% lower.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures come from the UNAIDS website.

**Media Contact:**

**Niree Creed**  
**Senior Communications and Media Adviser**  
02 62833519  
Government House  
Canberra



For East Asia, new infections have declined by nearly 25% - 10% in the South East.<sup>2</sup> Though we're comparatively small, Australia has a large stake in the global campaign.

We have committed a total of \$1 billion by 2010.

That encompasses our partnership with the Global Fund, with the Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative, with WHO, and with UNAIDS<sup>3</sup>.

These numbers underscore the serious challenges HIV/AIDS represents to the global community – and that we, as Australians, are serious about confronting them.

Numbers, though, are only half the story. They represent men and women, children and grandparents and aunts and uncles – neighbourhoods, networks, communities and economies.

To me, they speak of people I met, faces I saw – and, the faces I didn't see. The parents who were no longer there, the little ones who had not survived.

One memorable occasion will stay with me forever. In Mozambique, I nursed a small boy in a paediatric hospital, suffering such severe malnourishment that his skin was falling off his little bones.

He was one of Africa's 12 million AIDS orphans, being raised by his grandmother who sat beside me. I looked into her face strained with anxiety and exhaustion.

A wonderful senior nurse nearby quietly told me that this grandmother had no income at all, and no hope of one, and that the baby was probably being fed on leaves.

It was heart-wrenching to leave him there, with such meagre prospects.

But my journey was not one of sadness and despair.

In spite of immense hardship, we saw unstoppable hope.

Beside my mental picture of that little boy, I keep another picture.

It's of the AIDS orphans at the Sishemo Foundation school in Zambia.

Many of them live in child-run households with no water, no electricity, no floors; the only meals they get provided by the school.

But they sang for us, beautifully and joyously, about their dreams for their futures, about how they would take wing and fly.

Our whole group – even the toughest police and military personnel – were moved to tears.

Today, as I think about what World AIDS Day means – I hear their song and think of their courage.

They are the future of Africa. They are the ones who will take up our campaign.

Closer to home, we are committed to reversing the growth of HIV / AIDS in our country and our near neighbours: Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor.

We are working together – government and non-government agencies, voluntary and community organisations, health-carers and hospitals, family and friendship networks.

We engage and inspire each other to face this challenge, to shrink the numbers and to share the humanity of those who suffer – however long it takes and however hard it becomes.

I praise the work of those organisations and individuals gathered here today. Those who work to overcome barriers and prejudice.

I am grateful for your presence in the lives of the afflicted and marginalised. Your dedication and courage are an example for all of us.

My friends, I am very proud to wear this ribbon today, and to share this journey with you.

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<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS website.

<sup>3</sup> Information from the AusAID HIV/AIDS program website.

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