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AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

WORLD AIDS DAY

1 DECEMBER 1993

AIDS AND HIV - A TIME TO ACT!

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**The Hon Justice Michael Kirby**

**Past Commissioner, WHO Global Commission on AIDS**

This year World AIDS Day has been expanded into a whole week of AIDS awareness. A single day is no longer enough to bring the message of AIDS. And to reinforce the need for AIDS awareness.

- \* Awareness of the struggle of our fellow citizens, living with AIDS;
- \* Awareness of the needs of their supporters who share their hard journey;
- \* Awareness of the vital work of AIDS education;
- \* Awareness of the struggle against AIDS beyond Australia
- \* Awareness of the progress, and lack of progress, of science as it works against the clock towards a vaccine and cure.

Earlier this year, in France, I took part in a meeting to examine the implications of an AIDS vaccine. Amongst the experts present was Jonathan Mann, the past-Director of the Global Programme on AIDS. For him, the most important single insight derived from ten years at the frontline has been the direct relationship that exists between the protection of the human rights and dignity of those infected and at risk and an effective response to halt the spread of AIDS. This seems a paradox. But without a cure or a vaccine we must rely on individuals changing their behaviour - especially in sex and drug use. To win behaviour change, in such activities, we must gain the confidence and attention of the whole community - but especially the young. And especially those newly exposed to risk.

I came away from the conference in France reinforced in the wisdom of our strategy in Australia to fight HIV and AIDS by protecting against discrimination people living with HIV By empowering women, who are the main health educators.

By reconsidering our strategies on injecting drugs and by accepting diversity of behaviour as an unthreatening attribute of freedom in our country.

This year, the World Health Organisation has chosen as the theme for AIDS awareness "A Time to Act". But how can we act in the face of this enormous epidemic? And sights of individual suffering?

- \* We can support our scientists, like those at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney who are working on the protein molecule which may well be the "door" through which the virus penetrates the human body. Their work carries new hope for a successful vaccine;
- \* We can support our politicians who have taken courageous decisions and put the saving of lives before armchair moralising;
- \* We can support those who bring the vital messages of education to each new crop of young Australians who may be exposed to the virus. Despite their best efforts 600 Australians have acquired the virus since the last World AIDS Day. Six hundred too many; and
- \* We can contribute to the bodies that give daily help to people living with AIDS. We should reach out to these brothers and sisters not just one day a year, but whenever we can.

A time to act, they say. It has been a *decade* of action. In Australia we have made some good progress. But the hardest challenges lie ahead. We must meet them with:

- \* Unflagging support for those living with AIDS;
- \* Uncompromising honesty in education to prevent its spread; and
- \* Generous support for science which will one day triumph over AIDS just as we, in the meantime, must triumph over prejudice and discrimination.