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INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY

IAS CONFERENCE AMSTERDAM,
NETHERLANDS

26 JULY 2018

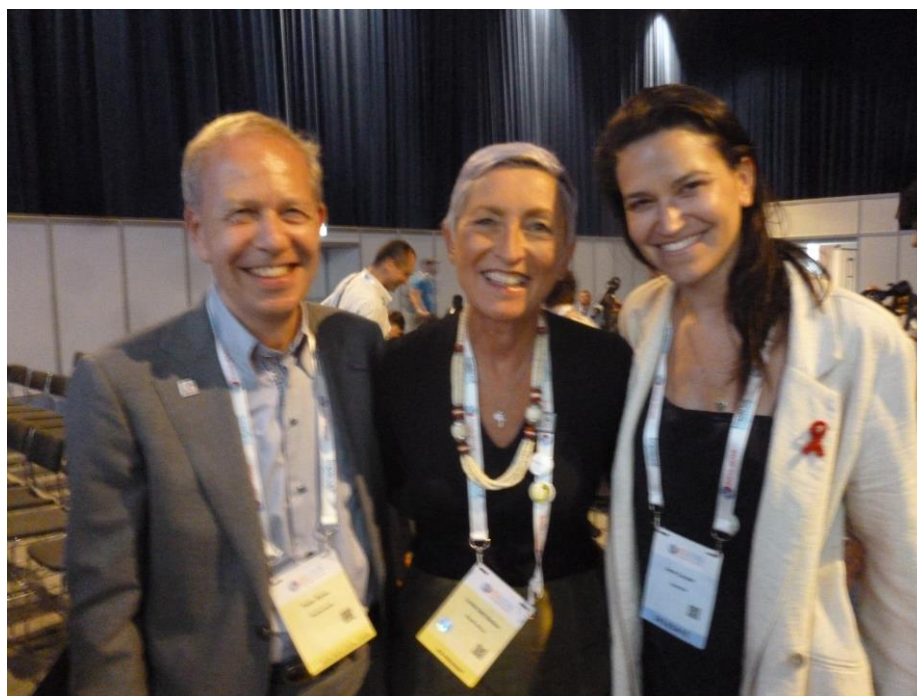
IAS MEMBERS' MEETING AND MEMORIAL

REMEMBERING DAVID COOPER: HE WIPED
AWAY THE TEARS

The Hon. Michael Kirby

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REMEMBERING DAVID COOPER: HE WIPED AWAY THE
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The Hon. Michael Kirby **



Peter Reiss, Linda-Gail Bekker (Co-Chairs) and Ilana Cooper at IAS Amsterdam 26 July 2018

DAVID COOPER'S JOURNEY

David Cooper's family came from Lithuania. That country was a dangerous place for Jewish families as the Second World War came closer. Many fled to Britain. Others to South Africa. David's family

* Text for an address to the IAS Members' Meeting 26 July 2018.

** Patron of the Kirby Institute, Australia and former Justice of the High Court of Australia.

escaped to Australia. This is just another reminder of the terrible losses suffered in the Holocaust. Intellect, talent, kindness and creativeness are the coinage in which that loss is counted.

David Cooper was born after the end of the War. His family explained their journey to him and the fate of those left behind. His family had fled because they were hated. They were hated not for anything they actually did to other people. But simply because of whom they were. As a young boy, David Cooper reflected on this instruction. It gave him a determination to be an antidote for such hatred. So he proved to be. He grew up with the special Jewish virtue of *Chesed*: kindness, born of love. Love in the place of hatred.

David Cooper was a precocious student. He entered the University of Sydney Medical School at the age of only 15. He wrote his first published letter to *The Lancet* when he was 22 years of age. For post graduate studies he had travelled to Boston in the United States. His special interest was immunology. But for the arrival of AIDS, he would probably have become a regular immunologist. However, the advent of the AIDS challenge made the man. So he returned to St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, an institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy of the Catholic Church. There he took charge of the special challenges that this new epidemic presented for vulnerable people: gay men, injecting drug users, sex workers, transgender people, children, prisoners and those dependent on blood transfusions. His patients loved him. I was told this by several of them. One was a friend from our school days. Others were looked after by my partner Johan who derives from The Netherlands and, like David, exhibited practical loving kindness. Johan became an "Ankali" in Sydney – a friend in time of need.

David Cooper was there when the International AIDS Society (IAS) was founded. He became a close associate of the brilliant duo whom fate had summoned forward to lead the United Nation's response to AIDS: Halfdan Mahler (Director-General of the World Health Organisation) and Jonathan Mann (who led the GPA – the Global Programme on AIDS).

DAVID COOPER AND JONATHAN MANN

Jonathan Mann came to Australia in those early days. Jonathan was brilliant, charismatic, adventurous and brave. He was sometimes wild and never wholly tamed by the struggle against HIV. He encouraged his circle to exhibit some of the same qualities. They rubbed off on David Cooper. They rubbed off onto many of us. They remain valid today – and not only in the AIDS epidemic. Jonathan decided to establish a Global Commission on AIDS. He wanted people from every continent to serve. He wanted some who were living with HIV and AIDS. He wanted others who could speak for the key populations and those chiefly at risk.

At that time, I was a newly appointed judge in Australia, working in law reform. David Cooper invited me to meet Jonathan Mann. We did so in a lovely restaurant in Rose Bay in Sydney by the sparkling harbour. David, although not himself a gay man, had a remarkable intuitive capacity (a kind of pre-digital Grindr) for sniffing out gay men and other people involved in this fearsome disease. Although, at the time, I was deeply closeted, he soon worked me out. And it was in this way that Jonathan Mann invited me to join the first Global Commission on AIDS. With

Jonathan and David, I can truly say that I was there virtually at the Creation. It was a very stressful time for everyone.

Jonathan Mann proclaimed the principle, 'not about us without us'. This was, he declared, a special kind of epidemic. The available medications were few. The prospects were grim. At the first meeting of the Global Commission the great scientists present predicted that we would have a cure and a vaccine within 20 years. Yet this was not to be.

DAVID COOPER IAS & AND THE INSTITUTE

By 1985, David Cooper had established his own centre in Sydney. It was originally called the National Centre on HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research. Its acronym was NCHECR. Later the present Prime Minister of Australia (Malcolm Turnbull), inaugurating the new name for the Institute, declared that the change had not come a moment too soon. Many people had thought that "NCHECR" was not a body devoted to AIDS research but the national security agency of the Czech Republic!

For the new name, David turned to me. 'No. No. No. You must choose a scientist's name. Like the Burnet Institute and the Doherty Centre, named after Australian Nobel laureates. We must go in search of a Nobel Prize Winner', I declared. But David Cooper would have none of it. Truly he was a disciple, through and through, of Jonathan Mann. Truly he understood, even in those very early days, that this epidemic would not be beaten without the participation of social science, of civil society, of vulnerable groups and community engagement. At the heart of their thinking was paradoxical reasoning. Paradoxically, the way to defeat HIV

and AIDS was to reach out to, and to engage, those most deeply despised because they were most at risk.

David Cooper became the President of IAS from 1994 to 1998. He was president at the time of the Yokohama Conference in Japan. He was in the chair at the time of the Vancouver Conference that marked the advent of the antiretroviral drugs. A kind of miracle had occurred in science. It was not yet a cure. But it was the next best thing.

So, this became the world of David Cooper: The IAS. The Kirby Institute. A global embrace of the lowest of the low. And mighty success in rolling out the antiretroviral therapy to millions as a practical demonstration of the right of all human beings everywhere to access to essential healthcare. Science was important. It became even more important. But so were the people affected and their communities. In the place of quarantine, this became the new paradigm for fighting epidemics. Other epidemics would learn. And the world community would embrace the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) and then the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Jonathan Mann's spirit lived on in the work of many. And amongst them, David Cooper stood out.

For his leadership and his loving kindness, he was himself easy to love. Most of all, his wife Dorrie and his daughters Becky and Ilana (who is here present) loved him deeply. They put up with his absences. They knew he was called to national and global duty. His colleagues at the Kirby Institute loved him. As befitted the ironical culture of Australia, he was not particularly hierarchical. When disputes about directions broke out, as was bound to happen, he would keep to the background, listening and digesting the views of all, great and small. Then in a high-pitched voice

he would at last intervene. He would give leadership, resting on unique insight and deep clinical experience. You can imagine what a blow his death has been to his family, his colleagues, the Kirby Institute and the global struggle against AIDS. Yet the work goes on and this conference demonstrates the huge progress that has been made and the further progress that is still awaited.

RETURNING TO AMSTERDAM

David Cooper would have loved this return of the IAS to Amsterdam:

- * He would have rejoiced in the invigorating passion of the co-Chairs, Linda-Gail Bekker and Peter Reiss. They paid a special tribute to him at the opening ceremony;
- * He would have shared most deeply the tribute to his friend Joep Lange who, with other HIV leaders, were travelling on board MH17 when it crashed in Ukraine on its way to the Melbourne IAS Conference;
- * He would have insisted that we should remember not only the AIDS researchers on board that plane but all the people, many from this Kingdom who were travelling, to holidays in places far away. Prudently perhaps, our co-Chairs omitted to add a thought that would certainly have occurred to David Cooper. This is not a political meeting and here I intrude a judicial, not a scientist's observation. There must one day be accountability for the

destruction of MH17. Real accountability. Those who fired the weapon and those who supplied it must be rendered accountable before the bar of humanity for that heinous crime against humanity;

- * David Cooper would have been proud of the ongoing work of cooperation between The Netherlands, Australia and Thailand (NAT) and the ongoing engagement of Professor Phanuphak as civil society stands up for itself in the context of life's special needs;
- * David Cooper would have been worried by the populist politics that add new dangers for the AIDS response today: the attacks on civil society; the withdrawal of funding for community groups; and the sidelining of key populations;
- * Yet he would have been encouraged by a session I attended yesterday at the request of President Bekker, chaired by Chris Beyrer, addressing how we can ensure progress in highly conservative communities. In Kurdistan. In Pakistan. In Lebanon. In Iran and Iraq. In Hungary. In the Russian Federation and in China. David Cooper always had an ear for the cry of the vulnerable. So should we;
- * David would have been intrigued by the growing significance of the coinfections;
- * He would have been alarmed about the waning of support for funding in the less developed countries but grateful for strong commitment of The Netherlands: usually there when it is needed;

- * He would have applauded the growing availability worldwide of PrEP therapy; and
- * He would have rejoiced in the progress towards a vaccine. David Cooper was convinced that the world would never ultimately overcome HIV and AIDS without an effective and safe vaccine.

It is hard to be at the IAS Conference and not to have David Cooper amongst us. Still his work goes on. It is our duty to advance this progress.

We honour ourselves by honouring the heroes who have gone before in this epidemic. By honouring Jonathan Mann, whose life was lost. By honouring David Cooper who also died too young. And by honouring all other heroes who have played key roles. The heroic patients. The brave leaders of civil society. Saving lives. Relieving pain. Listening to stories. Extending *Chesed*, loving kindness, to all caught up in the mighty challenge that is AIDS.

At the beginning there was enormous puzzlement and fear. A nurse in Sydney cautioned David Cooper against wiping away the tears of a dying patient grieving that cruel fate had dealt him such a bad hand of cards. But David was there. And he wiped away the tears.¹ David wiped away the tears. We do not have him here with us now. He cannot wipe away our tears. Yet his life and work were an inspiration.

With the inspiration comes his warning, repeating the central message taught at the outset by Jonathan Mann. We must not remedicalise HIV

¹ A story recounted in the address to the Memorial by Aaron Cogle (NAPHA).

and AIDS. Science is important. Very important. It will become even more important in this and other epidemics. But from our experience with AIDS, we have learned deep lessons about epidemiology and medical science. Nothing about us without us. Embracing the paradoxes. Extending the loving kindness.

To David Cooper's family, especially to Dorrie, Becky and Ilana and to all who grieve, we re-express the promise. We will not forget these heroes. We will stand as guardians for their legacy.