

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF AIDS
ORGANISATIONS

PACIFIC FRIENDS OF THE GLOBAL FUND

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE WITH
HIV AUSTRALIA

MESSAGE

WORLD AIDS DAY 1 DECEMBER 2018

The Hon. Michael Kirby

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The Global AIDS Conference of the International AIDS Society (IAS) met in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, in July 2018. It is a unique opportunity for experts in biological sciences to rub shoulders with experts in social sciences, leaders of civil society and occasional lawyers. I attended many of the earlier conferences. The 2018 conference was an opportunity to catch up on worldwide developments.

The opening ceremony afforded a memory of the tragedy that had accompanied the conference in Melbourne in 2014. So many delegates had perished in the downing of MH17, many of them leaders in the struggle against HIV in The Netherlands. Scientists gave rapid briefings on the latest advances in medical therapies and vaccines. Social scientists told of the challenges in securing outreach to vulnerable groups

* Member of the UNAIDS Reference Group on Human Rights.

on every continent. International organisations described new perils such as the cut back in funding of antiretrovirals desperately needed to keep people in poorer countries in receipt of life-giving therapies. Amsterdam was teeming with delegates. There was the usual mixture of good and bad news.

My own engagements were typical of a delegate coming from civil society, working on the frontline:

- * A conference session reviving the UNDP Global Commission on HIV and the Law. Tackling ongoing obstacles to healthcare from outdated, moralistic laws;
- * A session with organisations representing people who use drugs. At last, they were putting a face to their part in the epidemic. Eloquent advocates demanded that governments get off their back in disproportionate laws against adult drug use;
- * A meeting of LGBTIQ leaders from many countries, summoned by UNDP, examined what could be done to secure reform of laws and social policies;
- * A session of the conference offered sobering insights into the acute difficulties presented in Russia, Arab countries, parts of Africa and the Caribbean;
- * A moving session at the close paid tribute to Australian's own hero of HIV science, Professor David Cooper AC. He had been President of the IAS and was universally loved and admired. His

leadership of the Kirby Institute has been instrumental in Australia's own response to HIV and AIDS.

Gradually, brilliant scientists like David Cooper are pushing forward the treatments that will one day conquer HIV. Their work has contributed to the optimistic objectives of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2015. Everyone, everywhere, should have access to essential medicines.

Wealthier countries, like Australia, must stay the course. They must continue financial support to neighbours and to the world. A message of World AIDS Day 2018 remains. AIDS cannot be conquered in a single country. Solidarity is our watchword. A mixture of science, civil society and activists is unique. But it carries messages for the future strategies in healthcare. Everywhere.