

It's time for The World To Deliver

Even though the International AIDS Conference was being held in Toronto the Canadian government were conspicuous by their absence.

"It is Canada's time to deliver" announced Stephen Lewis, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/Aids in Africa, prior to the International Aids Conference in Toronto. Now approaching its third day, delegates and public figures are questioning whether the conference mantra, Time To Deliver, will be acted upon not only by Canadian politicians, but by leaders worldwide.

Canada's failure to meet its G8 pledge, to donate 0.7% of its GDP to tackle HIV and AIDS has sparked major criticism of political leaders as a whole. "You might have imagined aid was on its way since G8", said Jerry Barr of the Global Access Treatment Group, "Well, it hasn't happened-not even close".

Lack of political drive to end the pandemic has been witnessed in the response of global authorities tackling it. The US president's abstinence policy, which encourages young people to protect themselves from HIV by abstaining from sex before marriage, recently came under fire from Melinda Gates. The philanthropist and wife of Microsoft founder Bill said, "If you oppose the distribution of condoms, there is something more important to you than saving lives".

This shortage of political leadership has not only had an adverse effect on the lives of HIV-positive young people: it has also made the jobs of youths like Harish Monorath, youth ambassador for Suriname (South America), much harder. There, it is against the law for HIV-positive children to attend school, because it is believed that the virus is contagious. "We tried to put two children in school, but the headmaster refused. Under pressure, he admitted them. Within a week, 200 pupils were removed from the school by their parents. In a school of 300 pupils, 100 were left".

The absence of Stephen Harper, Canada's prime minister, at the conference has only enforced the view that world leaders are complacent about the spread of the virus.

Indeed, at a talk today entitled, Women Taking Charge, Mary Robinson, a former president of Ireland, said that a world of female leaders would mean a far more adequate response to HIV: "What would be the difference if women were to take charge of the AIDS response? Health would be a human right. Positive men and women would be appreciated for their leadership. When you think about all that, isn't it worth fighting for?"

Indeed, it would appear that if the Harpers and Bush's of the world do not act soon, they will be replaced by leaders who will. "We do not need the stigma and discrimination that comes through political leaders", said panelist speaker Lufhna Anyango. If our politicians don't advance soon in meeting the needs of HIV-positive men, women and children, the rest of the world shall soon agree with her.

About this article

This article was written by Lyra McKee, 16, from Belfast, who travelled to Toronto with two other members of Headliners to report from the International AIDS conference. Their work was published on [BBC Blast](#).

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