

AIDS doctors, activists call for more health funds

September 10 2010, By DONNA BRYSON , Associated Press Writer



Graca Machel, an International advocate for children and the poor, and wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela, speaks during an interview with the Associated Press in Johannesburg Friday, Sept 10, 2010. Machel said that the debate over food in her impoverished homeland did not end with the government's reversal on bread prices. (AP/Tawanda Mudimu)

(AP) -- Doctors and AIDS activists on Friday urged African governments to fulfill a decade-old pledge to spend more of their own money on health if they want international help in fighting AIDS.

Graca Machel, a longtime advocate for children in her homeland of Mozambique and around the world, told reporters Friday that African governments need to honor pledges made at an African Union summit in 2001 to devote at least 15 percent of national budgets to health.

To date, only a half dozen countries have done so. Machel blamed a lack of political will.

"We have to prove ourselves if we are to have the courage to look into the eyes of our children and say, 'We do care,'" she said.

Strengthened health systems will mean more [pregnant women](#) will get prenatal care and be tested for HIV, the virus that causes [AIDS](#). Those who test positive can take drugs that will prevent [HIV](#) from being transmitted to infants.

Dr. Avertino Barreto, Mozambique's deputy director of health, said foreigners cannot be expected to help if Africans don't help themselves.

"I believe that donors will come," Barreto said. "But African governments ... must take the first decision."

Machel, who is married to former South African President Nelson Mandela, said she will lobby African leaders hard.

"The tendency of making pledges which then are not met, it's not only health," Machel said. "That's why we hammer the issue of leadership."

She lamented that children born in Africa and other poor regions don't have the opportunities their counterparts in the rich world have to lead long, healthy lives.

"We're here to say this is unacceptable," she said. "It's not where you are born which should determine what kind of life you are entitled to."

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Citation: AIDS doctors, activists call for more health funds (2010, September 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-09-aids-doctors-activists-health-funds.html>

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