

AIDS charity honors Gates on eve of global conference

July 22 2012, by Robert MacPherson

Leading AIDS charity amfAR honored Microsoft tycoon Bill Gates on the eve of the International AIDS Conference, for his part in funding an ongoing struggle against the disease.

At a gala dinner at the Kennedy arts center Saturday, Gates accepted the Award of Courage on behalf of all scientists, [health workers](#) and those who have either died from AIDS in the past three decades or who live with the [HIV virus](#).

"We have many potential game-changers that are bringing us closer to the end of AIDS," he said, citing promising new vaccines as well as [antiretroviral drugs](#) that help those infected with HIV stay alive.

"What's important is to remember that we can continue to make these breakthroughs if we stay committed," Gates added.

"I'm optimistic... that we will develop these new tools... and that we will make AIDS history. Working together, I know we will."

Best-known for its celebrity-studded fundraising events, amfAR -- or the American Foundation for AIDS Research, co-founded by late actress Elizabeth Taylor -- is one of the premier non-profit funding and [advocacy groups](#) tackling the global HIV-AIDS crisis.

Through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, built on his software fortune, Gates has committed more than \$2.5 billion in HIV grants to

organizations around the world, including amfAR.

It has also committed more than \$1.4 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, according to a report from the foundation issued this month.

Some 25,000 people -- including celebrities, scientists and HIV sufferers -- are in Washington for the six-day International AIDS Conference that is poised to call for more strident global action to tackle the AIDS pandemic.

Introducing Gates was film star Sharon Stone, amfAR's global fundraising chairman, who wiped tears of emotion off her cheeks as she told him that "people will continue to live because of you."

On the red carpet into the gala, the soft-spoken Gates -- who lost a cousin to AIDS in the 1980s -- underscored the work that remains to be done, despite optimism among some AIDS activists that a breakthrough may be near.

"We need to invent a vaccine," he said. "We need to keep the funding levels going up. We need to grow out new prevention tools. There are still millions of people being affected."

"I think what we feel like is that we are at the beginning of the end," said Stone, who recalled how more than 30 million people worldwide have died from AIDS since it was first identified.

"There isn't a family left that hasn't been touched by the AIDS crisis," she told reporters. "Now is the time to push this through to the end. We must find a cure. We must find a vaccine. We need to draw this to a close."

Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, whose San Francisco constituency has been hard hit by AIDS, said "we have a greater hope of a cure" on the horizon.

"I never thought it would take this long, but I'm hopeful and grateful that we're at a better place now," she said on her way into the event.

Kevin Robert Frost, amfAR's chief executive, called [AIDS](#) "perhaps the single largest, the single biggest, medical challenge of the 20th century, and now, of course, into the 21st century."

He added: "We continue to hammer away at it because it's a challenge that can be overcome."

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