

Bill Gates: Disease fight is tough but progress is 'incredible'

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Through his foundation, billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates is the top nongovernmental donor to the Global Fund against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, with plans to give \$600 million between 2017-2019.

In an interview with AFP, Gates said the Global Fund's successes have given him hope, even in the face of huge challenges.

Q: Canada's International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau has said that our generation is the one that has to fight these epidemics—(and) [global warming](#). Are we a damned generation?

A: Every generation has challenges. But the world is in better shape today in terms of health, how long people live. If you go back to 1990, over 12 million children died before the age of five. Now it's less than six million.

Malaria is a big part of that but many other diseases—diarrhea, pneumonia—as well. One thing that isn't (as) visible to the public as it should be is this incredible improvement. And it's not just health.

If you take literacy in Africa, and the number of kids who go to school, it's a dramatic change, and if you look at China—at how they dropped poverty very dramatically.

Apparently we have a tendency that when countries do well, like China, Brazil, which no longer receive foreign aid—even India is making good

progress—then we shift our focus to the remaining tough cases: Somalia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, even Yemen or South Sudan, where you have conflicts going on. Those are... pretty tough situations.

But people are losing the fact that we're making incredible progress. Things are way better now, whether it's for people in general, or women (or) people with certain diseases.

HIV was a death sentence, and twice as many people were dying of AIDS compared to what we have now. And so, (at) the same time we highlight to the people the ongoing need to motivate them to be generous to things like this Global Fund, it's important for them not to lose sight of the fact of the great progress. And I'm always surprised how little people are aware of those changes.

Q: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the Global Fund to join the efforts to thwart antibiotic resistance. What can be done about it?

A: The Global Fund isn't in the research piece, they're in the delivery piece. They're helping the countries to buy the tools that exist and get them out there. Because of the Global Fund replenishment that we're having here in Montreal, that shows all these innovators and funders that there will be a budget funded to buy the new tools.

... (The Gates) foundation is a huge giver about upstream research. So is the US government and a number of governments including Canada and the UK. So if those tools come along, the Global Fund money will be used. ...

The pipeline is quite amazing for these [new tools](#), they're the only reason people can say they're optimistic about bringing the number down eventually of any of these diseases—it's only because of the new science.

Q: Are you concerned that US development aid could be threatened by the outcome of the next presidential election?

A: We're always encouraging the US to be more generous. If you look at the history, both the Democratic and Republican administrations since year 2000 have been very good.

In fact, the largest increase came under President George W. Bush: the creation of both the Global Fund and the initial US commitment to give a third of that in their own bilateral program. There is no direct connection that says that the Republican Party can't be really generous.

Now, it is a concern that - it's not clear what would happen with the current Republican candidate. Some of the statements make you wonder: will it be that same generosity? Foundations are not lobbying organizations, so they—whoever is elected—do their best job to work with them.

So, one candidate is more clear about their commitment to these issues. The other candidate hasn't absolutely said they won't support these issues. We don't lobby but we encourage candidates to talk about their commitments towards international aid.

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