

Montreal meet seeks billions to boost AIDS, malaria, TB fights (Update)

September 16 2016

International donors on Friday kicked off a drive to raise US\$13 billion for fighting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vowed the killer diseases can be "eradicated" by 2030.

Trudeau is hosting the fifth triennial Global Fund replenishment conference to fight against these diseases, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and a half dozen heads of states also in attendance.

"It's a pivotal moment for our global community and a challenge of this magnitude requires a united, sustained commitment from all of us," Trudeau told a press conference, urging nations to give generously.

Created as a public-private initiative, the Global Fund has so far spent US\$30 billion on programs to fight the three deadly diseases around the world, with most of it going to Africa.

It has been credited with helping to save 22 million lives and preventing 300 million infections over the past decade as it pursues a UN target of eradicating AIDS by 2030 and the other diseases even sooner.

But it needs to raise another \$13 billion to fund its operations over the next three years through 2019.

"These epidemics can be eradicated," Trudeau said. "By working together we can put an end to these devastating illnesses forever."

"Make no mistake," he added, "this is a defining moment for us all. Our generation of leaders will be judged by our action or our inaction on this issue."

Joining political leaders will be Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates, whose foundation has contributed a total of \$1.6 billion to the Fund since its inception, as well as U2 frontman Bono.

Bono is also co-founder of the non-profit ONE that works to reduce poverty and disease in Africa, and will be a guest speaker at the forum.

Targeting Africa

The Fund has brought enormous heft in the fight against disease, with encouraging results.

Since 2005, the number of deaths from AIDS has dropped by one third with nine million people receiving anti-viral treatments, according to Global Fund spokesman Seth Faison.

While more than 100 countries have received assistance from the Fund, more than 70 percent of its spending has gone to African countries, he said.

Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda have received the most.

"Disease knows no borders," said Senegal President Macky Sall, urging fellow leaders to make public health a priority as important as national security, for example.

In his opening address, Trudeau also highlighted that a sustained effort to eradicate AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, which continue to kill

"8,000 people daily," can also go a long way to reducing poverty, which disproportionately affects women and girls.

"Poverty is sexist," said Trudeau. "Our societies cannot succeed without the full participation and empowerment of women and girls."

This message to delegates was echoed by Michaëlle Jean, head of La Francophonie, who pleaded that "women and girls not be left behind."

During the Montreal conference, donor nations will publicly announce their contribution. The goal is to have collected US\$13 billion in pledges by the end of the conference Saturday night.

Early pledges have already brought the Fund to within 85-90 percent of that objective, Faison told AFP.

The United States, which has provided nearly one-third of the total funding so far, has pledged another US\$4.3 billion, he said.

The second biggest donor, France, announced in June it would provide US\$1.2 billion, maintaining its current level of commitment.

It was followed by Germany, which is pledging \$900 million, Japan at \$800 million and Canada, which has boosted its pledge by 20 percent to \$600 million.

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