

ADDRESS BY

SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR

**HONOURABLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING
COMMISSION,
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY AND
EARTH SCIENCES**

**AT THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON**

***“ACCELERATING INDIA’S RESPONSE TO RESEARCH FOR A
PREVENTIVE HIV VACCINE”***

**6.00 PM AUGUST 13, 2012 — AUDITORIUM HALL
NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL CONVENTION CENTRE
PALIKA KENDRA, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI**

INDIA

DIGNITARIES AND GUESTS

His Excellency Shri APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India

Shri Vayalar Ravi ji, Honourable Minister Honorable Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Science and Technology, Earth sciences and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad ji, Honourable Minister of Health and Family Welfare

Shri Kapil Sibal ji, Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development and Communications & Information Technology

Shri Oscar Fernandes ji, Honourable Member of Parliament & Chairman-Forum of Parliamentarians on HIV/AIDS

Shri JD Seelam ji, Honourable Member of Parliament

Ms. Margaret McGlynn, President and CEO, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

Secretaries and Senior officials from Ministry of Science and Technology, Health and Family Welfare and all invited guests from around the world and India

HOSTS:

Department of Biotechnology Ministry of Science and Technology

PARTNERS:

Forum of Parliamentarians for HIV/AIDS

Department of AIDS Control Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Department of Health Research Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Translational Health Sciences and Technology Institute

Research Centre for Biotechnology

International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

It is indeed a great privilege for me to be here today to welcome you to this important International Symposium – Accelerating India’s Response to Research for a Preventive HIV Vaccine

KEY MESSAGES

- Although the right to health is a universal aspiration, the key barrier to ensuring the fulfillment of this aspiration is the inadequate development of technologies to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease. The challenges at the same time are enormous. For Instance,
 - **Even if the number of new HIV infections continues to decline at current rates, there will still be more than 22 million new infections by 2015.**
 - **Fewer than one in five people at greatest risk of infection have access to effective prevention programs, such as education, condom distribution, prevention of mother to child HIV transmission, and HIV testing.**

We believe that the new HIV infections could be significantly reduced if effective prevention programs are expanded and reach those at greatest risk of HIV infection.

- The global momentum behind the call to find a cure for AIDS epidemic has reinforced the case for the use of a combination of prevention strategies. The past ten years of HIV prevention activities are beginning to show results. Despite the enormity of the challenge we still face , the number of new cases of HIV / AIDS annually have shown a substantial decline from about 2,70,000 cases earlier to about 120000 cases. **Research efforts and technological solutions need to be significantly accelerated, particularly with a view to extend our outreach to those who have still no access to the treatment.**
- If scaled with resources and a sense of urgency, a preventive strategy, supported by other key interventions, can save lives, prevent new infections and lower the cost to fund the global fight

against AIDS. **Significant recent research breakthroughs in the area of HIV-prevention, particularly in terms of ARV-based prevention methods such as pre-exposure prophylaxis and the provision of early treatment to prevent HIV transmission are important contributions of ongoing research.**

- We must find ways of **developing vaccines** that help us overcome the difficulties posed by nature. Insights and lessons from recent advances in the field of HIV Vaccine R&D, particularly **the findings of the RV-144 and the discovery of the broadly neutralizing antibodies give us hope and a sense of optimism.**
- Given the complexity of the task, the best minds must work together in furtherance of the objective of collaborative science .India remains committed to working towards the development of new technologies and we will provide necessary support to scientists and clinicians for this purpose.
- We are delighted to learn that some of the leaders in research are participating in the science symposium being organized as a part of this meeting. I am sure that this meeting will instill great hope in the people of India and worldwide who are looking toward science for evidence-based prevention interventions for HIV, such as a Vaccine.
- It is noteworthy that all research agencies be it in the Ministry of Science & Technology and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare are working together and have established **close and effective collaborative efforts for accelerating our research work** and that this national effort is closely networked with leading AIDS research institutes in the world.
- The Union Ministry of Science and Technology, is encouraging our best scientists and technologists to engage in finding solutions to major public health challenges such as AIDS, TB, and Malaria etc. We have also floated many novel mechanisms by which

academia, industry and public health experts can work together to develop effective preventive and therapeutic technologies. We are establishing a large number of centers of excellence where science, medicine and engineering can be linked to design novel solutions and technologies.

- **A fine example is the HIV Vaccine Design Programme, which has been established by our Department of Biotechnology, in a collaborative partnership between the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. The research work will aim to understand the biological processes connected to the HIV infection to design a novel vaccine. The focus will be on the subtype-C of HIV found in India predominantly.**
- Let me take the opportunity to once again express our immense pleasure in hosting this conference. May I congratulate the local organizing committee, distinguished guests, and representatives from various backgrounds who are participating in the deliberations . I wish the conference well as it progresses over these two days. I am sure that novel presentations and debates will indicate new ways of enhancing the work in the field of HIV research. I am delighted that professionals, political leaders, scientists and many other stakeholders are engaging with each other through conferences like these.

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