

IAS 2017 – OPENING CEREMONY REMARKS
Linda-Gail Bekker, IAS President
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Good evening! Bon soir!

Monsieur le co-président de la conférence, Mesdames et Messieurs, Chers Collègues, Chers Amis, bienvenue à tous, bienvenue à Paris!

On behalf of the International AIDS Society, our local conference partner the ANRS, and my co-chair, Jean-François Delfraissy, it is my great privilege to welcome you to the 9th IAS Conference on HIV Science in this beautiful city of Paris.

There isn't a better place to hold this year's conference than France, a country that has been such a critical ally in the fight against HIV. We are honoured to have here tonight my friend and colleague Nobel laureate Françoise Barré-Sinoussi of the Pasteur Institute, who nearly 35 years ago co-discovered HIV here in this very city of Paris. From that momentous breakthrough to today, France has been a stalwart leader in HIV research.

I would like to recognise, in particular, my esteemed colleagues of the IAS Governing Council. Your stewardship of this global network of scientists makes this meeting possible. And of course, Owen Ryan, our executive director and his remarkable team at the IAS who continue to work tirelessly for this cause.

This is the world's largest open scientific meeting on HIV. At this conference, we will hear about new innovations in PrEP; promising updates from vaccine trials; advances in our understanding of the immune response, virology and pathogenesis; novel agents and creative ways of delivering testing, treatment and prevention. Your work, your innovation and creativity and we salute you all!

I am thrilled to see so many of you here. Thank you for traveling to be here and thank you for sharing all of this important research. Science is the reason we've made such remarkable progress in the fight against HIV and science is what will ultimately lead to containment of an epidemic that has raged across the world, turned families and communities upside down and continues to claim lives and haunt individuals. To underscore the central role that research plays, we have renamed this meeting the IAS Conference on HIV Science and we encourage you to continue doing the great work you do and continue to bring it to this meeting.

Two years ago, in Vancouver and last year in Durban, we saw incredible advances, what many of us called a new "prevention revolution." We left those meetings hopeful, even optimistic.

Since then, frankly, the world seems to have turned upside down. Nationalistic forces are rocking the world. As are horrific acts of violence, terrorism and human rights abuses.

Whilst we have seen a decline in global funding for HIV in recent years most recently, major government donors are either calling for or considering substantive cuts to scientific research and program funding. As we gather today, the largest global donor in the HIV response is threatening devastating cuts to funding for research and treatment programmes. These attacks on funding, principles and programmes have already begun to erode the gains we have so

painstakingly made – if we are not actively moving forward on the HIV response then we are sliding back.

When I think back over the past year, one word comes to mind: chaos.

It's unsettling and frightening. But, here's a thing – having witnessed positive political change in my lifetime, I know that creativity and innovation can grow out of chaos.

Throughout the world, the AIDS crisis has uniquely spawned collaboration between unusual suspects: scientists and movie stars, activists and heads of state, computer programmers and community organizers.

We need to keep raging against the labels that divide us. As scientists, we must seek more partnerships outside our narrow professional fields. Sometimes it takes chaos to stir the pot. We need more venues like the Cure and Cancer Forum that took place yesterday and today, where oncologists and HIV researchers shared new work and new ideas for how to tackle both diseases.

Great things can happen when we step out of our labs and out of our fields of work. For many of us, chaos and change are uncomfortable concepts. As scientists, we seek order.

But as scientists it is also our duty to interrogate our methods. We have to ask the uncomfortable questions: Are we doing everything we can with what we have? Could we be more efficient with our money and our time? Are we acting quickly enough on the science and tools we already have? Are we asking trans people, men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who inject drugs, young women and others most effected by the epidemic what they really need? And are we listening to their answers?

I want to highlight young people, the face of our future, who are too often handed a raw deal. We must do better... a better job of investing in young people, a better job of deploying the tools we already have to reach the young people most at risk, and a better job of targeting our research to better understand and address their needs. What's more, we need to support young people to have a stronger role in how policies and programmes are designed and deployed.

My call to you is to harness the chaos. Beginning at this conference and continuing long after it's over:

Let's forge new partnerships that take us out of our comfort zones!

Let's pursue the new science that will deliver the results we need to save lives!

Let's channel the power of chaos and let it fuel our advocacy to demand the resources we need to do our jobs and bring an end to HIV.

We are scientists, but we are also advocates! These labels are not mutually exclusive and I believe all researchers embody these two roles. Two souls who epitomized the spirit of science and advocacy, community and activism left us this year – we were deeply saddened to hear of our sister, Prudence Mabele's sudden passing in South Africa just last week, and earlier this year we sadly and unexpectedly lost Mark Weinberg in the United States.

Prudence was a friend, a sister in solidarity, a fellow woman warrior – who fought for life-giving treatment, better care and good governance. She was a passionate woman, passionate about humanity.

Mark was a scientist, and will be remembered for many critical breakthroughs, but he will always be loved for his compassion, fierce sense of justice and loyal advocacy. I would ask that we take some time now to reflect on these two precious lives, what they meant to us, what they taught us and let us renew our resolve to honour their courage and commitment.

We cannot accept draconian cuts to research and programmatic HIV funding. Prudence and Mark would not allow this. We cannot afford to pull back our work and see the progress we have made undone. The book is half written, we have work to do and each of us has a role to play. Today, we raise our voices together to say onward, onward with science, onward with progress, onward with people and continue undauntingly to move to the final chapter in the control of HIV.

United, I know we are stronger than the forces that divide us.

Bon courage et vive la science!

It is now my pleasure to introduce Jean-François Delfraissy, my dear friend and colleague and your Local Scientific Chair for IAS 2017. For more than a decade, he led the ANRS, furthering France's provenance as a leader in HIV science.