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## Speeches and Remarks

### Remarks by U.S. Ambassador David C. Mulford at CII National Conference on HIV/AIDS

Kolkata  
August 18, 2005

#### As prepared for delivery

Distinguished guests, it is a pleasure to be here with you today in Kolkata. It is an exciting time to visit West Bengal. Growth is strong, the third fastest growing region in India at an impressive 6.3 annual rate. West Bengal also plays an important role in India's current national government, so I look forward to meeting the citizens and leaders of West Bengal and to engaging in discussions on those issues of greatest interest and importance to our two nations.

It is in fact one of those issues - HIV and AIDS - that I would like to address today. I would like to express my appreciation to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the India Business Trust for HIV/AIDS for organizing this regional conference -- "Accelerating the Business Response to HIV/AIDS."

The United States appreciates the strong leadership CII has shown on HIV/AIDS. This is the third such conference organized by CII. The first was in New Delhi in May with former President Clinton as the special guest, and the second in Chennai in late July.

I would also like to thank the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) and its dynamic director, Dr. Quraishi, the Government of West Bengal, the West Bengal AIDS Prevention and Control Society, and all the NGOs, businesses, individuals and other organizations for all their dedicated work on HIV/AIDS.

These are historic times for U.S.-India relations. In July, Prime Minister Singh concluded the most significant visit ever by an Indian leader to the United States. The cornerstone of that visit was an agreement to reach full civil nuclear cooperation between our two countries after more than 20 years during which nuclear relations have been a divisive issue.

President Bush and Prime Minister Singh agreed on other significant initiatives as well. They agreed to expand our Economic Dialogue by launching a high level forum of Chief Executive Officers of some of the most important corporations in India and the U.S. to advise our two governments on steps to promote greater economic activity between our two countries. They agreed to expand space cooperation by launching two U.S. instruments on India's forthcoming Chandrayaan-1 mission to the moon and to include an Indian astronaut in the U.S. astronaut training program.

The President and the Prime Minister announced an agricultural alliance that will focus on promoting teaching, research, service, and commercial linkages. They agreed to continue the Energy Dialogue aimed at ensuring adequate and affordable energy while addressing relevant environmental concerns.

Finally, the President and Prime Minister agreed to work together to tackle key global challenges through new initiatives on democracy, disaster relief, and HIV/AIDS. On HIV/AIDS, there was specific agreement to:

Continue to expedite U.S. Food and Drug Administration review of generic anti-retroviral drugs, of which 8 of 10 already approved are Indian; and Explore new opportunities for public-private collaboration on AIDS product development, including increasing capacity in India to conduct clinical trials.

As part of this initiative, President Bush announced new funding of \$7 million to scale up prevention efforts, including an emphasis on workplace programs. We are now working with NACO and private sector representatives to set up a Corporate Fund. I hope that Indian corporate leaders here today will join American businesses to respond with additional HIV/AIDS funding of their own.

The Fund will be managed by a private financial institution that will offer different options to which corporations can make contributions at the national, regional, and local levels, thereby reducing the management burden on individual companies.

Private sector support in India for the fight against HIV/AIDS is growing. In early July, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Avert Society organized an event that generated considerable corporate support for HIV/AIDS. Impressively, they committed to make HIV/AIDS a priority and signed a pledge to that effect.

At the CII Chennai regional conference in July, we saw another energetic response by the private sector. CII's Tarun Das moderated the session and key industry leaders from Nolar India, Taylor Rubber, Ashok Leyland, Apollo Hospitals, Tata, and others actively participated.

We now know without a doubt that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is an extraordinary global crisis, that it has potentially catastrophic social and economic consequences. It has killed 20 million people throughout the world, leaving in its wake grieving families, millions of orphans, and damaged economies. Over 42 million people worldwide are living with HIV today.

HIV/AIDS is more than a health crisis. It can cause major damage to economies with far-reaching implications. In high-prevalence countries, HIV/AIDS erodes economic growth through its negative impact on labor supply, productivity, savings, and the delivery of essential services. AIDS increases the costs of doing business, especially for small businesses and the informal economy.

Awareness about HIV/AIDS among workers is alarmingly low, at about 40-50%. And the perception of personal risk is also quite low. Without greater awareness, I am concerned HIV/AIDS could negatively impact business and industry here in West Bengal, as well as in other eastern and northeastern states, and in India as a whole.

The Government of India's latest Economic Survey ranked West Bengal third in India in terms of net state domestic product. In recent years, its economy has been growing at an estimated 7 percent per year, including in the IT sector. Software exports in 2004-2005 were approximately ten times higher than in 2000. Kolkata is said to host the country's fastest growing software technology park. But your progress is threatened by HIV/AIDS. We can fight back, make a difference, and turn the tide of the epidemic.

The Government of India is putting together a robust response to HIV/AIDS. Political commitment is increasing. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh established the National AIDS Council involving thirty ministries, each tasked to formulate an HIV/AIDS plan. The Government of India took an ambitious step last year by announcing it would provide free anti-retroviral drugs to 100,000 people by 2007. These are impressive achievements, but only a start.

President George Bush has made the fight against HIV/AIDS a priority. He has committed \$15 billion for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the largest commitment ever by a single nation toward an international health initiative.

The U.S Government has made health in India a priority, and our support is steadily increasing. In fact, India is one of five high priority countries under the President's HIV Initiative. In 2005, we are providing \$30 million towards AIDS control in India.

And U.S. Government agencies are working in the high prevalence states, including the Northeast to build the capacity of healthcare providers and public health professionals to provide quality prevention and care for people living with HIV/AIDS. The Lighthouse Project, which creates

awareness among workers in the port areas of Calcutta and Paradip in Orissa, is one example of a USAID-supported program.

The U.S. private sector is also involved. Private entities such as the the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clinton Foundation, the Richard Gere Foundation and the Elizabeth Glaser Foundation have contributed large resources for HIV/AIDS in India.

I am particularly heartened by CII's efforts to create awareness among its members and develop HIV programs in the workplace. I am told the response has been strong, with companies such as Hindalco, ITC and others initiating training and policy.

To be effective, action needs to be sustained and broadened. Some of the largest industries in India have demonstrated their commitment, such as the Tata group of companies, including Tata Steel in Jamshedpur, Ashok Leyland, Bajaj Auto, Bharat Petroleum, the Steel Authority of India, Larsen and Tubro, and Godrej Industries. We are working with CII and other associations to expand that commitment and have reached nearly 700 companies, who have committed to HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs.

Unfortunately, medium and small-scale enterprises are not as involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We also need to expand our efforts to include the workers in the informal sector. They are highly vulnerable to the disease but have the least access to health care.

We at the American Embassy have taken steps to address HIV/AIDS in our workplace. Last year we launched our own HIV/AIDS in the workplace policy and we are committed to provide training and set up a system to provide free anti-retrovirals and health care for those of our employees who need it. A one-page description of this program is available today.

India is at the "tipping point" in the curve of an HIV epidemic. A strong commitment from the private and public sectors can prove critical in containing and reversing this trend. How is

this to be done? Let me encourage you to take action in four areas:

- Establish an HIV/AIDS workplace policy in your own company.
- Set-up a workplace intervention program which includes training on prevention of HIV/AIDS and providing access to Voluntary Counseling and Testing services.
- Take action to stop discrimination against HIV positive people in your workplace, and reduce the stigma of HIV in your communities.
- Sponsor antiretroviral drug treatment and care for your employees and their families.

If we all join in supporting these efforts, we can make a big difference. We have seen it elsewhere. Why not India?

Finally, I want to underline that AIDS prevention is everyone's responsibility. I have made this one of my top priorities as a manager of a large organization. I am concerned about the health and welfare of U.S. Embassy employees. If you care about your staff, you will set an example for others to follow in the fight against HIV/AIDS. If you care about productivity losses in your country over the next five to ten years, you will become a leader in industry's response to HIV/AIDS. If you care about India becoming an economic power and assuming a leadership role in today's global economy, you will commit to addressing HIV/AIDS in your own workplace and your own communities.

I wish you good luck in the future in this great endeavor. And I once again ask for your personal effort and commitment in this important battle.

Thank you.

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