

World AIDS Day 2011

Statement by IAPAC President José M. Zuniga

A quick survey of how the number 30 manifests itself across the gamut of human affairs reveals that it does so in many ways. For example, major periods of economic growth and technological progress tend to occur in 30-year cycles. But as we approach World AIDS Day 2011, it is another 30-year history we are commemorating, for it was on June 5, 1981, that we saw the first hints of an obscure microbe's gathering fury with publication of a brief epidemiological report, "*Pneumocystis* Pneumonia – Los Angeles," which appeared in that week's US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) morbidity and mortality report.

Before that fateful date, no one could have factored the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) into the calculus of death. Indeed, it arrived just as biomedical science offered itself cautious congratulations for having the final conquest of infectious diseases within sight. There are reasons to mourn for and reflect upon the millions of lives lost to and affected by HIV/AIDS over the past 30 years. There are also numerous breakthroughs we should universally celebrate – without which the needless suffering and hastened deaths linked to this insidious disease might be far greater still.

These breakthroughs, though, especially those chronicled over the past year in relation to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and treatment as prevention, pose questions for HIV-treating clinicians and public health practitioners – not to mention our elected officials. The former must confront an ever more complex clinical landscape – one made difficult by multiple barriers including a shrinking health workforce and the strain of delivering myriad services, including management of age-related comorbidities and the provision of biomedical prevention. On a public health level, the latter must struggle to assure universal access to antiretroviral therapy and biomedical prevention – which poses an incredible challenge given ongoing economic turmoil. Indeed, if the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria's recent decision to grant no new funding through 2015 is any indication, the chances of expanding access to life-saving and -enhancing interventions in large swathes of the developing world appear to be slender given an increasing evaporation of global political and financial commitment that existed just a few short years ago.

Let us recommit to overcoming the obstacles that lie in the way of achieving our dream of freeing the world of HIV/AIDS, or at least achieving what US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton referred to as an "AIDS-free generation." As important, let us heed Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's warning: *Let us not look back years from now and regret that we did not do more.*