



30 YEARS OF AIDS: A HISTORY OF HIV AND THE INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY

Thirty years ago this month, the first cases of AIDS were diagnosed by US health agencies. This fact sheet tracks the International AIDS Conference and subsequently the International AIDS Society's engagement in and impact on the epidemic over the last three decades.

June 1981, USA - The first cases of AIDS are diagnosed by US health agencies.

The first conferences about HIV/AIDS are mainly focused on the necessity to share knowledge on biomedical and epidemiological research.

April 1985, Atlanta – I International AIDS conference (AIDS 1985) 2,000 participants. This conference is organized by the WHO, the US Department of Health and Human Services, major research institutes and is led by American and European scientists and public health officials.

June 1986, Paris – II International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1986) 2,800 participants. The opening lectures are delivered by the co-discoverer of HIV, Luc Montagnier, and Bila Kapita, Chief of Internal Medicine in Kinshasa, Zaire, one of the first to talk openly about the serious problem the African region is facing. It is a very brave statement, Kapita is sentenced to jail but he's released with the help of international intervention.

June 1987, Washington DC – III International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1987), 6,300 participants. For the first time, the fight goes political: during the conference several demonstrations against the lack of political commitment take place. Even if by May 1987 more than 20,000 had died of AIDS, US President Regan is still reluctant to make a public statement about the epidemic. The protests are also against the US FDA as experimental treatments are slowed down by bureaucracy. Partly due to the protests, the conference receives widespread media coverage. Behavioural and sociological research begins to be more and more present at the conferences.

1987 – The US travel ban: the US government bans HIV-positive travelers from entering the country citing both public health concerns and the potential financial burden on US health service. The IAS tries several times to convince the White House to overturn the ban, for the San Francisco conference in 1990 the US administration issues a waiver so that HIV-positive delegates can attend it but it refuses to revoke the ban. As a result, the IAS decides not to organize conferences in the US anymore and the AIDS 1992 conference, which was supposed to take place in Boston, is relocated to Amsterdam.

1988 – 1990 THE IAS AND ITS EARLY CONFERENCES

1988 – The International AIDS Society (IAS) is founded

With the growth of the conference, the need to establish an association responsible for organizing it becomes apparent. A group of prominent scientists from all over the world meets to discuss how to proceed and decides to found an international society governed by an Advisory Board with Lars O.Kalling as its first President. The IAS is initially registered as a non-profit organization in Frankfurt

Mission and objectives of the IAS

- Promotion of global solidarity between people working in HIV and AIDS
- International and interdisciplinary approach (including ethical, legal, economic and political aspects of HIV/AIDS in addition to biomedical issues)
- Fighting discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS and those most vulnerable to infection
- Promotion of research and more effective application of new knowledge to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

June 1988, Stockholm: IV International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1988) 7,500 participants. This conference signs the end of the period where the main focus was on biomedical aspects of HIV/AIDS. The “Face of AIDS” is introduced at the conference as a forum of people living with HIV, it is a revolutionary change as patients and civil society are now included in the debate. This conference also marks the start of close collaboration between the IAS and UN agencies.

June 1989, Montreal: V International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1989)

Theme: The Scientific and Social Challenge of AIDS - 12,000 participants. Activists occupy centre stage during the conference: Canadians activists protest the lack of a federally-funded AIDS strategy, US activists denounce the US entry ban for PLHIV and both want a greater involvement in the conference. During the same conference, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda reveals that his son died of AIDS in 1986, becoming the first African leader to speak about AIDS in his own family.

June 1990, San Francisco: VI International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1990)

Theme: AIDS in the Nineties: From Science to Policy - 11,000 participants. The conference sees huge protests due to a cold federal government response to the epidemic and a lack of effective treatment for PLHIV. In preparation for future conferences, the IAS highlights the importance of avoiding police violence. Since then the IAS has been successful in balancing the freedom of expression and protest with allowing speakers and participants to be heard.

1990 – 1994 REORGANIZATION AMID WANING HOPE

June 1991, Florence: VII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1991)

Theme: Science Challenging AIDS - 8,000 participants. This conference is quieter than the earlier ones. The theme of the conference reminds us of the importance of science in a time of growing desperation to halt the spread of HIV. Experts from Africa and India

speak at the Opening Ceremony highlighting the growing burden of the epidemic in their countries.

July 1992, Amsterdam: VIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1992)

Theme: A World United Against AIDS - 8,000 participants. The conference is organized in just one year following its relocation from Boston to Amsterdam. The focus of the conference is on human rights as a public health imperative.

June 1993, Berlin: IX International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1993) 14,000 participants.

Berlin is chosen to remind us of the importance of fighting racism and discrimination, “tear down the walls” is the refrain of the conference: walls between HIV positive and HIV negative and between rich and poor. Unfortunately 1993 is a disappointing year in HIV research: the results of the Concorde trial of AZT monotherapy shows no medium- or long-term benefit; also, the economic impact of AIDS epidemic is becoming more and more obvious.

1994 – IAS is registered as a legal entity in Sweden and by-laws are written to govern the new organization. In this year the IAS Governing Council replaces the Advisory Board with five members elected by the IAS members from five different geographic regions.

August 1994, Yokohama: X International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1994)

Theme: The Global Challenge of AIDS: Together for the Future - 10,000 participants. The conference is held in Japan, at the time the only Asian country to admit some of its citizens live with HIV. The organizers work hard to avoid friction between the conservative Japanese society and the western activists. The hope is to leave a permanent impression in the attitudes, legislation and policies of the host country.

1996 – 1988 THE TREATMENT REVOLUTION

July 1996, Vancouver: XI International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1996)

Theme: One World One Hope - 15,000 participants. After many years of disappointment the atmosphere is electric and full of hope as finally scientists are able to report a significant treatment breakthrough: highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) sees mortality and morbidity among patients drop dramatically and the prognosis for HIV diseased shifts from almost certain fatality to a chronic illness. The term “Lazarus syndrome” is used to describe patients who return from the brink of death to good health. After the excitement, though, it becomes quickly evident that while the therapy can be used widely in high-income countries, in the areas of the world where the epidemic is more devastating the access to it is very limited.

July 1998, Geneva: XII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1998)

Theme: Bridging the Gap – 15,000 participants. The theme of the conference touches several issues: gap in treatment between wealthy and poor, gap in power and autonomy between men and women, gap between governmental authorities and civil society. At the conference, the IAS initiates the Young Investigator Awards to recognize scientific excellence among young researchers.

1998 – The **Geneva principle** is established to provide a balance between community and science in the conference programme.

- the Scientific programme includes basic and clinical science, epidemiology and prevention science, policy, political science, economic and socio-behavioural research
- the Community programme includes skills-building and sessions addressing the community-based response to the epidemic.

2000 – as the large conferences are shifted to a biennial schedule, IAS starts to organize a new series of conference: the **IAS Conference of HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention** with a focus on science.

2000 DURBAN CONFERENCE – AIDS DENIALISM AND TREATMENT EQUITY

July 2000, Durban: XIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2000)

Theme: Breaking the Silence - 12,000 participants.

This conference is enormously important in building momentum to change the approach to global public health. It is the first AIDS conference in a developing country, more importantly in a country with the highest HIV-prevalence rates in the world. The theme focuses on the staggering impact of the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and on the inequity in treatment access between the developed and the developing world.

South African President Thabo Mbeki declares he doubts AIDS occurred in South Africa and that, if so, it is caused not by HIV but by poverty. He also declares AIDS symptoms are side effects of ART produced by Western pharmaceutical companies. The minister of Health shares the same ideas and forbids the use of antiretrovirals to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

These declarations prompt 5,000 scientists from around the world to publish the “**Durban Declaration**” confirming the overwhelming scientific evidence about the aetiology of AIDS. The Durban conference proves to be a unique opportunity to address both treatment inequity and denialism. During the closing ceremony Nelson Mandela speaks against the irresponsibility of the South African government on AIDS.

The success of the conference provides local organizers with a financial surplus that supports several national conferences in AIDS over the next years. A year after the conference the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS 2001) Declaration of Commitment establishes ambitious goals for treatment, prevention and care.

In 2001 the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria** is established.

2002 – 2004 THE PUSH FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS

July 2001, Buenos Aires: 1st IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis and Treatment (IAS 2001), 3,300 participants including more than 600 participants who are supported by the conference’s scholarship programme.

2001 – IAS initiates two new programmes:

- Clinical Trial Partnership for Clinical Trials in Developing Countries
- Global Monitoring of HIV Drug Resistance

2001 – IAS starts Share, the first Education Programme in HIV Clinical Care at a time when antiretroviral treatment was limited in developing countries and clinicians almost had no experience with antiretroviral drugs.

2001 – The IAS INDUSTRY LIASON FORUM (ILF) is launched, with the goal of accelerating scientifically promising ethical HIV research in resource-limited countries. The main focus lies on the role and responsibilities of industry as sponsors and supporters of the research. The ILF is part of the research initiatives launched by the IAS. In 1999 and 2001 the IAS co-sponsored conferences on the topic of microbicides in Montreal and Washington respectively.

2002 – IAS Governing Council decides to move the IAS Secretariat to Geneva in order to be closer to other major international health and development organizations as well as UNAIDS and WHO. A new management structure is put into place and additional staff is recruited to organize the IAC and IAS conferences.

July 2002, Barcelona: XIV International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2002)

Theme: Knowledge and Commitment for Action - 18,500 participants. The conference registers a greater participation by women and individuals from low- and middle-income countries. The Durban effect from the conference in 2000 increases the importance of HIV on the world's political stage; former President Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela are two of the high profile leaders to participate in the conference, this reflects the growing political commitment to respond to the epidemic after 2000 which enables the launch of programmes to scale up HIV interventions. Finally, the combinations of events at the turn of the millennium including intense activism and corporate philanthropy in the pharmaceutical sector, lead to the dramatic reductions in the price of antiretrovirals.

July 2003, Paris: 2nd IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2003) 5,000 participants

2004 – The eJournal of the International AIDS Society (eJIAS) is launched (now [JIAS](#))

July 2004, Bangkok: XV International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2004).

Theme: Access for All - 18,500 participants.

The conference theme reflects the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, care and treatment interventions and the growth in political attention and resources since Durban. Thailand is chosen partly for the huge presence of PLHIV in the country and because the country has achieved significant reductions in HIV incidence. Although Thailand registered big success, the “war on drugs” began by Thai government was a big failure with 2,000 death and arrests. By hosting the conference there IAS hopes to highlight Thailand's success while bringing global attention to the downside of criminal justice versus public health approach to injecting drug use.

The need to secure commitment on AIDS from political and other leaders leads to the launch of the **Leadership Programme**, whose objectives are to promote concrete commitments by political leader in response to AIDS.

The IAS and partners also pilot the first **Global Village** and the **Youth Programme**. The **Global village** is open to the general public and works as a bridge between local communities and researchers, health professionals, leaders and community representatives taking part in the formal conference proceedings
The **Youth Programme** is an opportunity for thousands of young people from around the world to discuss the response to the epidemic and to generate new ideas for treatment, prevention, human rights issues

2004 – 2008 CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION

September 2004 – IAS Secretariat moves from Stockholm to Geneva under the leadership of newly hired Executive Director, Craig McClure. Fundraising for initiatives and other activities between conferences allow the IAS to expand its policy and programme staff and increase its capacity to contribute to policy development, advocacy and regional partnerships work between the international conferences.

2005 – IAS Governing Council establishes a Strategic Plan for the organization: “Stronger Together: Strategic Framework 2005- 2009”, defining objectives for the organization in four areas: Governance and Membership, Education, Networking and Promotion of Best Practice, Policy/Advocacy and Long-Term Financial Sustainability.

July 2005, [Rio de Janeiro: 3rd IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention \(IAS 2005\)](#); biomedical prevention science is added to the programme in recognition of a research field growing rapidly in size and importance.

ANRS/IAS Prize launched

2006– IAS establishes a Regional Partnerships Department to strengthen its links and collaborations with the independent regional conferences and societies.

August 2006, Toronto: [XVI International AIDS Conference \(AIDS 2006\)](#)

Theme: Time to Deliver - 26,000 participants. The theme reflects a growing sense that despite increased resources and 25 years of experience, the global response is still falling short in its effort to curb the epidemic and care for those infected; moreover, gender inequity, homophobia and discrimination against sex workers and drug users continue to hamper prevention efforts. This conference is notable for its focus of female-controlled prevention technologies. During the conference the IAS delivers **skills-building workshops** on how to write a manuscript for publication, how to write an abstract and prepare effective conference presentations.

2006 – IAS launches two new awards:

- **IAS/ICRW Young Investigator Prize; Women, Girls and HIV**
- **IAS Young Investigator Award**

July 2007: 4th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2007), Sydney 6,600 participants. During the conference starts a pilot education programme aimed at young investigators working in basic science, clinical research and prevention science. During the conference the **Sydney Declaration is published**, to draw attention to the need for operations research to guide scale-up efforts calling for donors to allocate 10% of all HIV resources to research.

2008 – IAS Celebrates its 20th Anniversary

August 2008, Mexico City: XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008)

Theme: Universal Action Now - 24,000 participants. This is the first conference to be held in Latin America, its main focus is on the urgent need for action at all levels to achieve access to services in the health sector, and also to end stigma and discrimination and advance the human rights of all people, especially those most affected by HIV, the most marginalized communities in the world.

2009 – IAS Goes Green and implements a CSR programme to make IAS and its conferences more socially responsible. The conference secretariat takes measures to reduce, reuse, recycle and raise awareness.

2009– IAS membership reaches more than 14,000 growing substantially from less than 6,000 in 2004 and 10,000 in 2008.

19- 22 July 2009, Cape Town: 5th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2009) 5,800 participants. The first IAS conference held in Africa represents the ideal opportunity to refocus the international community attention on the continued challenges faced by the region.

During the conference, the South African government, moving dramatically from the position showed during AIDS 2000 in Durban, confirms its commitment to scale up HIV treatment.

2010 – IAS Governing Council establishes a Strategic Plan for the organization, “IAS Strategic Plan 2010- 2014”

June 2010: The Vienna Declaration an international call for Drug Policy based on science, not ideology, is published ahead of AIDS 2010. by the end of the conference the declaration is signed by 12,725 individuals.

July 2010, Vienna: XVIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010)

Theme: Rights Here, Right Now 19, 300 participants. The focus of the conference is on Human Rights, whose protection is essential in drive for universal access. Results of the Caprisa 004 trial, a microbicide gel for women that has been found to help prevent HIV transmission, are presented, opening the door for a completely new synergistic tool in HIV prevention which has tremendous potential to empower women and girls.

February 2011 – Bertrand Audoin becomes the new IAS Executive Director.



July 2011, Rome: [6th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention \(IAS 2011\)](#). After a break of 20 years, a major international AIDS conference is taking place in Italy again. The conference will be dedicated to the exploration and implementation of HIV science with a focus on how scientific advances can be translated into practical interventions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

After the removal of the US travel ban for HIV-positive travelers in 2010, the IAS decides to organize a conference in the US again, the [XIX International AIDS Conference \(AIDS 2012\)](#) will be held in Washington DC.

In 2012 **Françoise Barré- Sinoussi**, co-discoverer of the HIV virus and Nobel laureate, will become the IAS President.