



**AIDS  
VACCINE 2008**  
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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **IN ONE OF HER FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCES, NEW SOUTH AFRICAN HEALTH MINISTER CALLS TO PRIORITISE VACCINE RESEARCH AS PART OF COMPREHENSIVE HIV PREVENTION**

*AIDS Vaccine 2008 Conference to Renew Focus on Global Collaboration*

**Cape Town (October 13, 2008)** – As more than 900 of the world’s top vaccine scientists, advocates and policymakers gathered in Cape Town for the ninth annual AIDS Vaccine conference, newly appointed South African Health Minister Barbara Hogan called upon the global community to expand collaborative efforts toward the development of a safe and effective HIV vaccine. AIDS Vaccine 2008 brings together experts from across the globe working to advance research and development of vaccines that could one day prevent HIV infection.

“It is important that this conference is being held in South Africa at this time. Our scientists, clinicians, communities and citizens are essential participants in HIV vaccine research as part of a broader, comprehensive HIV prevention effort,” said the Honourable Minister Hogan, who delivered the conference opening address. “Institutions like the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative are conducting world-class research. Working in concert with the international community, we will continue to play a leading role in the development of a safe and effective HIV vaccine.”

Convened by South African scientists in coordination with the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, the 2008 Conference marks the first time that the AIDS Vaccine meeting will be held in Africa.

“Sub-Saharan Africa can truly be described as “the eye of the storm” of the global HIV epidemic,” said South African Deputy Minister of Science and Technology the Honourable Derek Hanekom, who also addressed the conference opening ceremony. “All of us who are involved in HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment – policy makers and scientists, the health sector, educators, and the international donor community – must intensify our efforts to ensure that society, in particular those who are most vulnerable, have access to measures to protect themselves from this devastating disease.”

The African region – and South Africa in particular – has also emerged as an epicentre of some of the most important preclinical, clinical and epidemiological research in the search for an HIV vaccine.

“Just as the Durban AIDS Conference in 2000 drew the world’s attention to the moral imperative of providing HIV treatment to all who need it, this conference will highlight the urgent need to prioritise vaccine research as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy,” said Dr. Alan Bernstein, Executive Director of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, the conference’s lead sponsor. “An HIV vaccine is not something that only one scientist, laboratory or even country will achieve alone. This is a global effort, and our success will require an integrated global strategic plan.”

The Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise is a global alliance of independent organisations dedicated to accelerating research toward a safe and effective preventative HIV vaccine.

Over the last year, international trials of two of the most promising HIV vaccine candidates were halted or cancelled. The AIDS Vaccine conference will focus on identifying new approaches to vaccine research to complement studies already underway. At the conference, leaders and experts in HIV prevention agreed that the field is at a crucial stage, and that the discovery of a safe and effective vaccine requires collaborative work that incorporates the latest and most innovative ideas and technologies. Key focus areas include studies to better understand the interactions between HIV and the human immune system, as well as efforts to better integrate basic research, primate studies and human clinical trials.

“The AIDS Vaccine conference features some of the world’s greatest scientific minds, and I believe that their discussions will help us tackle the tremendous challenges ahead,” said Dr. Lynn Morris, Conference Chair and Head of the AIDS Unit at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, Johannesburg. “By consolidating our knowledge, we will plan our future fight against the virus and continue working toward a vaccine that will one day prevent its spread.”

Recognising the need to engage young scientists in HIV vaccine research, and to support researchers in countries hardest hit by the global HIV epidemic, the AIDS Vaccine 2008 conference awarded over 90 scholarships to scientists from countries including South Africa, China, Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda, as well as 49 Travel Awards to scientists from Europe and the USA. Local students in Cape Town also received registration waivers.

In addition to Minister Hogan, Deputy Minister Hanekom and Drs. Bernstein and Morris, speakers at the AIDS Vaccine 2008 opening ceremony included Dr. Malegapuru Makgoba, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of KwaZulu-Natal; and Stanley Plotkin of Sanofi Pasteur and the University of Pennsylvania, developer of the rubella vaccine.

AIDS Vaccine 2008 will cover all aspects of HIV vaccine research, in oral and poster sessions, as well as symposia and debates. Peer-reviewed abstracts will be made available online by *AIDS Research and Human Retroviruses* (<http://www.liebertpub.com/aid>) during the week of the conference and plenary presentations will also be available for download.

Major sponsors of AIDS Vaccine 2008 include the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, the Office of AIDS Research of the US National Institutes of Health, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Other sponsors include the US Military HIV Research Program, the US National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the South African Department of Science & Technology, the World Health Organisation’s African AIDS Vaccine Programme, France’s Agence Nationale de Recherche sur le Sida et les hepatites virales (ANRS), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, The Wellcome Trust, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative/Medical Research Council, South African TB and AIDS Training and the Aurum Institute for Health Research.

For more information, see: <http://www.hivvaccineenterprise.org/conference/2008/index.aspx>

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