Transcript of a Speech from the Closing Ceremony of the XV International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2004)

By Nelson Mandela
From Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

July 16, 2004

Thank you again for asking me to participate in the closing ceremony of your International AIDS Conference. It seems that I have reached a level of seniority, which entitles me to participate in closing ceremonies. Despite the fact that I am an old age pensioner with no power and with even less influence, as you will know I have announced my retirement from public life, which means that I should not be here today. **However, the fight against AIDS is one of the greatest challenges the world faces at the start of the 21st century. I cannot rest until I'm certain that the global response is sufficient to turn the tide of the epidemic. The importance of tackling this issue should not be undermined by the many other problems that confront a global society today. In the course of human history there has never been a greater threat than the HIV/AIDS epidemic.** Our attention to this issue cannot be distracted or diverted by problems that are apparently more pressing. History will surely judge us harshly if we do not respond with all the energy and resources that we can bring to bear in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Last night we introduced you to our 46664 sexual campaign. We reminded you how they are [Inaudible] to reduce us to prison numbers and so reduce our humanity. We were kept alive by our strong sense of hope and the firm knowledge that the world would not forget us.

Last night we called upon you that is **every global citizen not to forget the millions of people suffering from HIV and AIDS and not to reduce them to mere statistics. We share a common humanity with our brothers and sisters suffering in this epidemic. Ask yourself what you can do as global citizens against the fight against HIV and AIDS. We must never forget our own responsibilities. Last night we also called upon donors to substantially increase their funding for the fight against AIDS. This applies not only to governments, but also to the private sector and private foundations. It also applies to every global citizen. No amount of money is too small to make a difference.** We highlighted the importance of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria and the good work that it is funding in 127 countries around the world. We need to build at the public/private partnership, that is the vision of the Global Fund. We challenge everyone to help fund the fund now. As part of my 46664 campaign, I have challenged countries to develop comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs. This includes the great importance of providing access to the [Inaudible] treatment urgently needed to save millions of lives now. **We have highlighted the needs of marginalized populations such as refugees, migrant workers, IDUs, prisoners and sex workers**. **As former prisoner #46664 there is a special place in my heart for all those who are denied access to their basic human rights.** We urge countries to make the policy changes that are necessary to protect the human rights of those who suffer from unfair discrimination.

Finally, we have stressed the overriding importance of strong leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We speak not only of political leaders, but also of leaders from every sector of society. We are delighted to see that

this conference has introduced a new leadership program into the proceedings. Let us now see more leaders who are prepared to mobilize and inspire their people to respond to the crisis. The day after tomorrow, the 18th of July, will be the day I turn 86. There could be no better birthday gift than knowing that there is renewed commitment from leaders in every sector of society to take really and action against AIDS. **We know what we need to be done. All that is missing is the will to do it.** Allow me to enjoy my retirement by showing that you can rise to the challenge. I thank you.