

Speech of
PROFESSOR LUC MONTAGNIER
Co-Winner of the 1993 King Faisal International Prize
For MEDICINE
(Acquired Immunodeficiency Diseases)

Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies
Distinguished Guests,

Ten years ago the first isolations of the AIDS virus were made in my laboratory.

The King Faisal Prize International Prize has chosen to honour today the team of retrovirologists which led this discovery. This is an appropriate way to celebrate the anniversary. I am particularly grateful to the Committee for this award which also justifiably honours my two main collaborators and colleagues, Dr. Barré-Sinoussi and Dr. Chermann.

Through this award, the honour goes also to the team which not only isolated HIV but worked hard to prove that this virus was the best candidate to be the cause of AIDS. I would like to add to this list, in particular my close collaborators, the late Jacqueline Gruest, Sophie Chamaret, Charles Dauguet, Claudine Axler, as well as my colleagues of hospitals and Paris University who played an important part in this work: Drs. W. Rezenbaum, F. Brun-Vezinet, C. Rouzioux, J.C. Gluckman and D. Klatzmann.

A few months later, this discovery was extended and confirmed by several groups of researchers in the USA, the first of which was that of Dr. Gallo and his co-workers. These findings are now almost unanimously accepted. The isolation and characterization of HIV-1 and HIV-2 have allowed the implementation of tests which eliminate AIDS transmission by blood transfusions or blood products, the use of antiviral therapeutics, and the development of potential vaccines.

However, there are still many problems to be solved. While the

epidemic continue to spread at a high rate in many parts of the world, we have no definite cure nor efficient vaccines.

We researchers therefore have the duty and responsibility to increase our efforts by exploring new avenues of research, by trying to understand better the disease which is far more complex than initially thought and by forming a close relationship with clinicians and patients. We also have to convince the public and governments that it is the right time to make an unprecedented international effort to support research on AIDS.

In this spirit, I recently created, together with Pr. Federico Mayor, General Director of UNESCO, a new Foundation for Research and Prevention of AIDS. This Foundation seeks financial support for avenues of research which have not been thoroughly explored so far and also to promote help for people suffering of AIDS in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

One of the first objectives of the Foundation will be to create three clinical research centres in Europe, Africa, and America, using new laboratory markers for the follow-up of HIV-infected patients. In this way the interactions between basic research and clinical research will be optimized. The hope is to extend the long silent period which follows initial HIV infection and precedes clinical symptoms, using a combination of treatments. Similarly, new types of vaccines can be developed from a better understanding of interactive factors in HIV infection.

The future of AIDS epidemic is really dependent on the effort we are making today.