



**REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR  
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO  
HON. RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON  
AT THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON AIDS EDUCATION**

**AUGUST 6, 1990**

**EL SAN JUAN HOTEL  
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

It is an honor to welcome you to the Fourth International Conference on AIDS on Education, which has been rightfully called "Challenges and Choices for the 1990's."

Indeed, History presents each generation with particular challenges and, without a shadow of doubt, AIDS is the paramount health problem we shall be facing in next decade. This twentieth century plague will not only test international medical capability but also the moral character of our civilization.

The numbers of reported cases are on the rise throughout the world. We can do no less than commit ourselves fully to combatting AIDS.

Puerto Rico with its booming metropolitan areas and urban development has also suffered the consequences associated with progress, taking its fair share of AIDS cases and HIV infection. Currently, we have over 4,000 persons diagnosed with AIDS, and some 40,000 persons infected with HIV. In fact, Puerto Rico has the highest

incidence of AIDS in the United States, behind Washington D.C.

For me and my administration AIDS is a top priority. In 1985 we began major efforts in Puerto Rico. Until then, besides the Surveillance Program of the Puerto Rico Health Department, little was being done to confront the new disease. We made a commitment to further research, treatment and public education. A good deal of progress has been made.

Scientific research in the island has flourished. Over seventeen important AIDS studies are being conducted in the Island. They range from a general seroprevalence population study linked to knowledge, attitude and behavior to the transmission of HIV in prenatal populations. Much is being investigated concerning health behavior patterns and high risk practices, and clinical studies under way are promising.

We have significantly increased funds for AIDS health services. Just recently, we launched a \$27 million AIDS Action Plan which will provide an

islandwide comprehensive care system, including complete prophylaxis, sophisticated laboratories, hospitalization, out-patient care, homes and hospices for terminal patients --and beyond that-- it will also provide for social, psychological, economic and spiritual needs. The plan is to form a coalition between all sectors of our society to address this problem united.

These aspects, along with biomedical and pharmacological advancements, are important but the biggest battle to be won is the one we are fighting on the field of prevention. The only known effective vaccine against this virus is education.

As an essential part of our AIDS Action Plan, we will be carrying out a new massive education program geared toward risk reduction practices. The new education campaign makes use of the findings resulting from previous Knowledge, Attitude and Behavior studies. It has been designed to address, alongside general public, specific high risk groups as well as HIV infected persons.

Our AIDS Action Plan is also targeted to increase the education for health professionals. Health professionals are already being trained in the skills required to handle AIDS by agencies, such as the School of Medicine, Department of Education, Latin American STD Center, Community Based Organizations, and others.

Another major progress is being made in our public schools, where an ambitious education AIDS campaign is being developed from kindergarten to senior year. Over 500,000 students islandwide have already received this educational program in its first year.

Other aspects of the problem, such as research investigation and implementation of new technology along with treatment modalities will be spearheaded by our Universities, including the Medical Science Campus of The University of Puerto Rico.

We are optimistic on the final results of these efforts, which we consider only a beginning. For we will not cease our struggle to assign every resource available to improve primary prevention

efforts as well as care for individuals and families with HIV disease. In fact, we plan to strengthen our battle with an additional \$24.6 million that will be authorized to Puerto Rico under the Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act of 1990. A bill which we expect will be passed and signed by the President very soon, Puerto Rico. Of this total, \$8.6 million would go to San Juan and the other \$16 million would benefit the rest of the island on a yearly basis, beginning in fiscal year 1991-92.

I have always said that great problems can only be solved with an equal amount of enthusiasm, imagination and hard work. Clearly, the war against AIDS will not be easily won, but I am confident that we can win many significant battles. To this we are wholeheartedly committed. The real measure of our success will occur years from now. And I know that efforts such as this Conference shall be part of it!

Thank You.