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Don't flag on support, AIDS chiefs say

PARIS: Leaders in the war on AIDS pleaded with donors yesterday to maintain support despite the global financial crisis, warning that retreat would imperil hard-won progress to provide drugs and craft a vaccine against HIV.

"The financial crisis is of course affecting, and clearly affecting, the capacity of donors to fund international programmes on AIDS," said Michel Kazatchkine, executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Speaking to journalists at the start of a four-day scientific congress on AIDS vaccines, Kazatchkine said he was worried about donor retrenchment next year, when a three-year round of fund-raising comes to an end.

"2010 will be a key year when it comes to funding global health and funding AIDS prevention, treatment and AIDS science," he said.

"The risk is... that we lose the momentum, that we lose the trust and that we lose the hope that we have generated in an unprecedented movement in global health in the last eight years."

Peter Piot, former chief of the UN agency UNAIDS and now head of the Institute for Global Health in London, said he was "very worried... that attention for the AIDS response in general is fading."

"It's very ironic, (in) that it comes at a time when we have real results -- four million people on antiretroviral therapy in lower and middle income countries (and) achievement in HIV prevention."

Piot added: "Now is not the time to decrease efforts, because the bill is then going to get higher and higher. It's a matter of 'pay now or pay later.' We know that there is money... The bailout of banks has shown that there is money, there is mega-money when it is needed." — AFP

