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# US hosts largest AIDS conference amid calls for action

**WASHINGTON:** The world's largest meeting on HIV/AIDS opened here yesterday with calls to speed up the global response to the three-decade-long epidemic that killed 1.5 million people last year.

The 19th International AIDS Conference is expected to draw 25,000 people, including politicians, scientists and activists, as well as some of the estimated 34 million people living with HIV.

Among them is the only man who was fully cured of HIV through a bone marrow transplant, American Timothy Brown, who is scheduled to appeal for a fresh push towards a cure during the six-day conference.

Other high-profile appearances include Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former president Bill Clinton, former first lady Laura Bush, singer Elton John, philanthropist Bill Gates and actress Whoopi Goldberg.

President Barack Obama, who faced criticism for deciding not to attend, is sending a video message and will invite attendees to the White House on Thursday.

Held every two years, the conference is returning to the United States for the first time since 1990, after being kept away by laws that barred people with HIV from travelling to the country. The ban was formally lifted in 2009.

On Saturday, leading AIDS charity amfAR honoured Microsoft tycoon Bill Gates for his part in funding an ongoing struggle against AIDS.

At a gala dinner at the Kennedy Arts Centre, Gates accepted the Award of Courage. Through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Gates had steered more than US\$2.5 billion (RM8 billion) in HIV grants to organisations around the world. **AFP**