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## Drugs 'arsenal' could help end AIDS — WHO

**WASHINGTON:** Thirty years into the AIDS epidemic, a cure remains elusive but a growing arsenal of drugs could someday help end new infections, the World Health Organisation's HIV/AIDS chief says.

The key is figuring out how to best manage the latest advances, Gottfried Hirnschall said in an interview with AFP during a visit to Washington this week ahead of the International AIDS Conference that begins here July 22.

Antiretroviral drugs may reduce the risk of infected people passing on the virus, and may prevent healthy people from becoming infected through sex

with HIV-positive partners, but the new possibilities have also stirred controversy.

Still, these medications saved about 700,000 lives worldwide in 2010 alone, which experts have described as an extraordinary accomplishment.

Research breakthroughs and progress in some countries "demonstrate that it is possible to really advance significantly in scaling up the response and even start to think about eliminating new infections," Hirnschall said.

The world now has 26 antiretroviral (ARV) drugs on the market and more in the pipeline for treating people

with human immunodeficiency virus, which has infected 60 million people and killed 25 million since the epidemic first emerged.

"We have a fairly large arsenal of drugs available," Hirnschall said, noting that the drugs are better now than they used to be — less toxic, more robust, less likely to trigger resistance and more tolerable — but are still not perfect.

Side effects remain a concern, and officials are carefully monitoring the emergence of resistance, with the WHO set to release its first global report on drug resistance in low and middle income countries on July 17. — AFP