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HONOURED: Gates (left) accepts an award for visionary leadership on global health and HIV/AIDS from actress Sharon Stone at a gala benefit event for the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, DC. — AFP photo

AIDS charity honours Gates on eve of global conference

WASHINGTON: Leading AIDS charity amfAR honoured Microsoft tycoon Bill Gates on the eve of the International AIDS Conference, for his part in funding an ongoing struggle against the disease.

At a gala dinner at the Kennedy arts centre Saturday, Gates accepted the Award of Courage on behalf of all scientists, health workers and those who have either died from AIDS in the past three decades or who live with the HIV virus.

"We have many potential game-changers that are bringing us closer to the end of AIDS," he said, citing promising new vaccines as well as antiretroviral drugs that help those infected with HIV stay alive.

"What's important is to remember that we can continue to make these breakthroughs if we stay committed," Gates added.

"I'm optimistic ... that we will develop these new tools ... and

that we will make AIDS history. Working together, I know we will." Best-known for its celebrity-studded fundraising events, amfAR — or the American Foundation for AIDS Research, co-founded by late actress Elizabeth Taylor — is one of the premier non-profit funding and advocacy groups tackling the global HIV-AIDS crisis.

Through the Bill Melinda Gates Foundation, built on his software fortune, Gates has committed more than US\$2.5 billion in HIV grants to organizations around the world, including amfAR.

It has also committed more than 1.4 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, according to a report from the foundation issued this month.

Some 25,000 people — including celebrities, scientists and HIV sufferers — are in Washington for the six-day International AIDS Conference that is poised to call for more strident global action to tackle the AIDS pandemic.