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Stars raise RM85 million at Cannes Aids gala

CANNES, France: A galaxy of stars including Leonardo DiCaprio, Dustin Hoffman, Nicole Kidman and Will Smith raised more than US\$20 million (RM85 million) at the Aids benefit that is the social highlight of the Cannes film festival, organisers said on Friday.

The annual amfAR Foundation for Aids Research gala dinner late on Thursday saw celebrities and benefactors paying up to US\$500,000 for a table at the exclusive Eden Roc hotel just along the French Riviera at Cap d'Antibes.

Actresses Jessica Chastain, Milla Jovovich and Eva Longoria, former footballer David Beckham, and directors David Lynch and Pedro Almodovar were among the other A-listers present for the auction to help the charity founded by the late Hollywood legend Elizabeth Taylor.

The starry guest list which also included Uma Thurman, Tobey Maguire, Adrien Brody, Christoph Waltz and model Bella Hadid were entertained by Motown legend Diana Ross who sang "I Will Survive", while rapper Nicki Minaj belted out her hit "Truffle Butter".

Organisers had hoped to beat



Models Bella Hadid, Jessica Hart, and Georgia Fowler at the amfAR gala. — AFP photo

the 22 million euros raised at last year's dinner when DiCaprio — who acted as auctioneer — sold a sculpture by British artist Damien Hirst for 3.1 million euros and a day with Hollywood star Kevin Spacey for half a million.

"Ending Aids is not a fantasy. It's a goal within our reach and one amfAR was among the first to recognise as attainable," said the foundation's president Kenneth Cole.

"Our goal is a cure for 2020. You have the power to stop

this pandemic that has killed 35 million people," he told the guests.

This year's lots included a week in an exclusive resort in the Maldives for 60 people, a fully-restored 1958 Jaguar XK150 sports car and a weekend for 30 on a luxury yacht.

Beckham sold himself — or at least the chance to play in a soccer match with him — for 350,000 euros (RM1.67 million).

For those on more modest

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— Kenneth Cole, amfAR Foundation president

budgets, there was a 14-metre (46-foot) statue specially created for the occasion by French artist JR, whose "Faces Places" documentary with Agnes Varda is one of the hits of the festival, which ends on Sunday.

The final figure from this year's auction will be released later on Friday.

Since the galas began at Cannes in 1993, the "Cinema Against Aids" dinners have raised more than 174 million euros for the charity. — AFP