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Better AIDS care for all

US retools global fight against disease

WASHINGTON: The United States is retooling its global multibillion-dollar fight against HIV/AIDS to transform healthcare in some of the world's poorest countries, the US AIDS chief said.

Eric Goosby, who President Barack Obama named last year to take over the Bush administration's signature foreign aid initiative, said on Tuesday that US AIDS relief efforts must change to face a broader health crisis stretching decades into the future.

"We've created a very good start at what was an emergency response. We now need to move that emergency response into a sustained response," Goosby said in an interview.

"It's a harder lift, it's not as flashy, it's not as rapid in our ability to deploy and put in place. But it is more durable."

Former President George W. Bush launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar) in 2003, pledging an initial US\$15bil

(RM51bil) to fight AIDS around the world.

In 2008, the Democratic-controlled Congress authorised an additional US\$48bil (RM163bil) to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and Pepfar now operates in some 87 countries around the world, most of them in Africa but also including China and Russia.

Goosby, who has launched a new five-year strategy for Pepfar, said it was time to address underlying healthcare problems in AIDS-hit countries - a huge expansion of programme goals - even though the immediate crisis was far from over.

"We are still responding to an emergency in no uncertain terms. It is still killing millions of people," Goosby said.

The AIDS virus infects 33 million people globally and about a million in the United States, but more people are living longer thanks to HIV drugs - many of them supplied through Pepfar programmes, according to a recent UN report. — AP