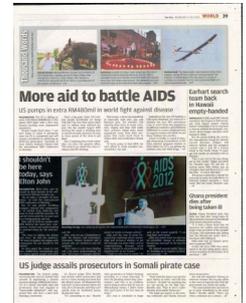


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I shouldn't be here today, says Elton John

WASHINGTON: Elton John says he should be dead because of his self-destructive lifestyle decades ago.

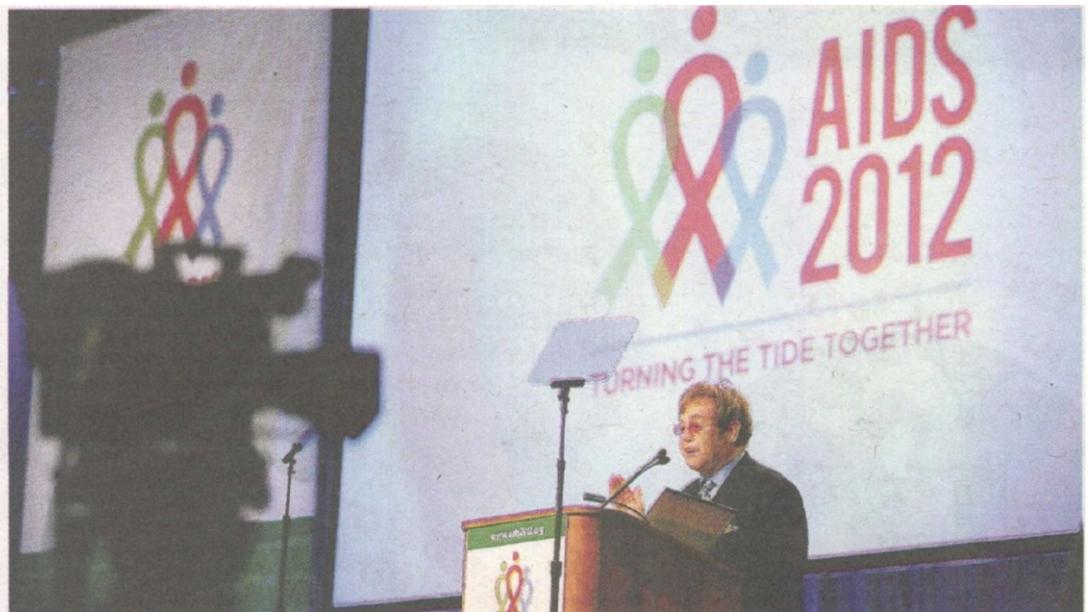
"By all rights, I shouldn't be here today," he told the International AIDS conference on Monday.

But, he said, people including strangers showed him compassion as he battled drug addiction and came to terms with his sexuality. He said he's been sober for 22 years and has a loving partner and son.

John said he believes people with AIDS deserve the same love, compassion, respect and understanding he received when he "hit rock bottom".

"We have to replace the shame with love," he told the audience. "We have to replace the stigma with compassion. No one should be left behind."

He also urged the crowd to end hate, indifference, homophobia and the stigma against people with AIDS



Standing strong: John speaking during the 19th International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC. — AFP

and HIV.

John, who set up a foundation to fight the disease, said prevention, treatment, clinical research and a vaccine also are needed to end the epidemic.

"All it takes is a bit more funding and a bit more understanding," he said. "All it takes is dialogue and the

power of words to change actions."

John said the way to move forward is by combining talents, knowledge and technical abilities to get the message out about AIDS, such as communicating through social media, though he acknowledged not knowing how to use Twitter.

"I have no idea how to tweet," he

said, as the crowd laughed. "I can sing, but I can't tweet."

John also noted what he said was an incredible change in attitudes toward gay marriage in the last few months.

He saluted several public figures for standing up in support of same-sex marriage. — AP