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FOREIGN EDITORIAL

The wavering war

THE GLOBAL WAR ON AIDS HAS RACKED UP enormous successes over the past decade, most notably by providing drugs for millions of infected people in developing countries who would be doomed without this life-prolonging treatment. Now the campaign is faltering.

Donations from the US and other wealthy countries have levelled off while the number of people infected with HIV, the AIDS virus, grows by a million a year. By one informed estimate, only \$ 14 billion will be available of some \$ 27 billion needed this year to fight the disease in the developing world. Fewer than 4 million of the 14 million people infected with the AIDS virus are getting drug treatment — far short of the goal of universal access set by the US and others.

Donor nations cite the economic crisis and tight budgets as reasons to slow their contributions to the global fight against AIDS. The Obama administration and many donor nations apparently believe that more lives could be saved by fighting other cheaper diseases, such as respiratory illnesses, diarrhoea, malaria and measles.

The results of those decisions can be seen in Uganda and other countries where the campaign against AIDS seems to be falling apart. Hundreds of thousands Ugandans need the drugs and likely cannot get them because clinics now routinely turn new patients away.

The US has been a leader in providing financing for the war on AIDS through bilateral programmes and a multilateral global fund. Now, instead of a sharp increase in donations, as once planned, the administration proposes only a slight increase in bilateral financing and a modest reduction in its multilateral contribution.

It has shifted its focus to childhood diseases, keeping young mothers alive, and interrupting the transmission of HIV between mother and child. It is pushing countries to improve their medical delivery systems, manage their own AIDS programmes and contribute more of their own funds.

Those are good goals. But the AIDS pandemic is still spreading. And the goal of universal access to treatment remains a distant dream. —*NYT, May 13, 2010*