



MESSAGE TO THE INTERNATIONAL AIDS CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL, 21ST OF MAY 2017 FROM LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, ANDREW LITTLE.

To all who are gathered together today for the 2017 International Aids Candlelight Memorial I send my support and aroha. To Body Positive, Positive Women, the New Zealand AIDS Foundation and all those who help organise these events and undertake the important work on HIV and AIDS, I thank you.

Each year on this occasion my mind turns to the people of my generation who were young men and women as the world became aware of AIDS, and who did not survive into their middle age as I have. I mourn for them, and I think of their friends and families who saw them die from a disease we did not fully understand. Events like this and symbols like the quilts that have been made around the world are our public memorial to what are also deeply felt private losses. To those friends and family, please know that your loved ones are remembered.

As the decades have passed we have learned far more about HIV and AIDS, but still there is so much more to do. The theme of this year's International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is Ending AIDS Together. Around the world 33 million people are living with HIV today. Through international solidarity, access to medicines, education and reducing stigma, we can rid the world of HIV and AIDS.

Here at home the New Zealand AIDS Foundation have launched the Ending HIV campaign. I was proud to sign the New Zealand Labour Party up to that campaign at the Big Gay Out in February. This is an ambitious campaign to end transmission of HIV by 2025. We can do this- together. With a combination of safe sex education and practice, early and regular testing and access to medicines, including PrEP, we can stop the transmissions. But it is a big ask, and one that all of us have to support with long term dedication and commitment. You have that from me and the Labour Party.

I also want to acknowledge tonight those who are living with HIV. Living with a chronic illness is tough, but the more so with HIV. There is still significant stigma attached to positive people. We can only break that down by talking and listening. As one positive person has said "You can live with the virus, but the stigma will kill you emotionally. I encourage you to talk about HIV; that is the only way we can fight the stigma". So to all those living with HIV I acknowledge you, your courage, and I give you my support.

So, all of us, on this International AIDS Candlelight Memorial Day join together and say, for the sake of all those who have gone before, we can end HIV and AIDS together. Kia kaha.

Andrew Little
Leader of the Labour Party.