

Board stymied on picking new AIDS, TB chief

The Boston Globe

By John Donnelly, Globe Staff | November 2, 2006

WASHINGTON --The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria will launch a new search for an executive director after board members failed to agree on two finalists in marathon meetings this week in Guatemala City.

The decision, reached late Wednesday, means that the organization will likely not have a new leader for several more months, perhaps not until the board's next scheduled meeting in April, officials said. The contract of the fund's current director, Richard Feachem, ends in March.

The international fund, which has distributed several billion dollars to fight the three infectious diseases, faces several critical issues in the coming months, including securing additional funding and trying to improve poorly performing grants.

Closed discussions on Tuesday and Wednesday narrowed the field to two candidates -- Michel Sidibe of Mali, a senior official at UNAIDS, and Michel Kazatchkine, France's HIV/AIDS ambassador, according to participants who asked not to be identified.

Under the board's rules, the executive director must win support of seven of 10 members from developed countries as well as seven of 10 members from developing nations. Sidibe won support from developing countries, but could not secure the necessary votes from rich nations, although the United States backed him, participants said. And Kazatchkine received enough support from the rich countries, but not enough from developing nations, they said.

Three others earlier in the running were Hilde Johnson, Norway's former minister of international development; US Representative Jim Kolbe, an Arizona Republican not running for re-election; and Bill Roedy, president of MTV Networks International.

Steven Radelet, a senior fellow at the Washington-based think tank Center for Global Development, which recently produced a report on new challenges facing the fund, said the failure to elect a new leader "is not good for the organization," but added that "trying to force through one candidate wouldn't be good, either." "I think it's a good process in that they clearly give voice to developing countries in a much stronger way" than the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, he said.

During the meeting, the fund's board approved \$604 million in new grants to fight the three infectious diseases, bringing the fund's portfolio to \$6.4 billion in programs in 135 countries.

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