

South Africa's Mbeki Sees HIV-Aids Link

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CAPE TOWN (Reuters) - South African President Thabo Mbeki Wednesday refused again to acknowledge that HIV causes AIDS , but said an assumed link did form the basis of his government's response to the AIDS crisis.

His remarks to parliament during a question-and-answer session went further toward acknowledging a relationship between HIV and AIDS than he has since he first questioned the link in October last year.

"The program of the government in this country is based on this thesis that HIV causes AIDS and everything in the program says that," Mbeki said.

But he went on to tell legislators that while the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) could be a factor in the AIDS pandemic, it could not actually cause the syndrome.

"When you ask the question 'Does HIV cause AIDS?', the question is: 'Does a virus cause a syndrome?'. It can't....A virus cannot cause a syndrome.

"The syndrome is a group of diseases as a result of immune deficiency, of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome," he said.

Mbeki and his cabinet have refused to concede that HIV is the sole or primary cause of AIDS and the president has appointed an international panel, including controversial scientists who doubt the existence of AIDS, to research the link.

"The basic problem is that many people don't want to study this question. They are perfectly happy to repeat what is said to be the conventional wisdom," he said.

Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang refused at a news conference Monday to answer whether HIV cause AIDS.

AIDS activists have condemned his skeptical stance, saying he is undermining efforts to halt the spread of the virus that already has infected more than 10 percent of the population of 43 million. The umbrella Congress of South African Trade Unions demanded this week that the government admit the link, warning that hesitation was costing lives.

Echoing public concern about the effect of Mbeki's ambivalent stance, the Mail and Guardian newspaper devoted its front page Friday to a headline:

"Just say yes, Mr. President."

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://www.aegis.org)