Aids as an International Political Issue
Peter Piot

in AIDS Between Science and Politics
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This chapter examines the transnational dimension of the AIDS response. It begins by considering the initial reactions of international organizations to HIV and the emergence of different perspectives on the nature of the AIDS, including AIDS as a communicable disease, as a human rights issue, as a challenge to development, and as a problem for human security. It then discusses the creation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; the international response to AIDS; the new millennium as a turning point in the global fight against AIDS; and the creation of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The chapter concludes by addressing the question of why AIDS for several years was the only disease that figured prominently on the public agenda when there were so many other pressing health concerns in the world.

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This book recounts the experiences of the founding executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as he fought the disease from its earliest manifestations to today. It shows how the AIDS pandemic was not only catastrophic to the health of millions worldwide but that it also fractured international relations and public health policies in nations across the globe. It shows that, as the author struggled to get ahead of the disease, he found that science does little good when it operates independently of politics and economics. He also
found that politics is worthless if it rejects scientific evidence and respect for human rights. The book describes how the HIV/AIDS epidemic altered global attitudes toward sexuality, changed the character of the doctor-patient relationship, altered the influence of civil society in international relations and broke traditional partisan divides. It illustrates how AIDS thrust health into national and international politics. It argues that the global reaction to AIDS over the past decade is the positive result of this development, and that this shows what can be achieved when science, politics, and policy converge on the ground. Because the achievements that have been made are fragile, the book warns against complacency and the consequences of reduced investments. It refuses to accept a world in which high levels of HIV infection are the norm. Instead, it explains how to continue to reduce the incidence of the disease through both prevention and treatment, until a vaccine is discovered.