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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

December 29th, 2004

Mr President,

Thanks very much for your note. December is cold, but days are bright here in Dublin this Christmas. In Ireland they say, "peace comes dropping slow"... your phone calls to Paisley and Adams are greatly appreciated.

This week is a perfect week to reflect on where the world is, concerning Africa (you did ask me to keep you posted...). I know the "least of these" are a priority for you and the First Lady. A wise man said to me once "Stop asking God to bless what you're doing, find out what God is doing ... it's already blessed". I imagine that's what brought you to the Millennium Challenge and to your historic AIDS initiative... (The word is, PEPFAR will have 200,000 on ARVs by June. Wow. Alongside the Global fund. Double Wow).

It seems 2005 can be the year that the game changes for Africa. I've never felt momentum like this before... even countries as historically preoccupied with their own problems as Germany are signalling they don't want to be left out if a Marshall-type plan is being proposed for Africa.

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have been using this Marshall-plan language to describe the strategic value of investing in Africa as a bulwark against future extremism, an argument your own Administration has made... the way the U.S. invested in Europe post-World War Two as a bulwark against Sovietism... There are ideas on how to front load the monies necessary to pay for this... Gordon Brown's International Financing Facility etc. Josh is not sure it can work with Congress, but... it is gaining momentum with France, Italy, and UK. Canada and Germany are looking at it too.

What's important to us though is not 'the how' but your commitment to a real paradigm shift on Extreme Poverty. The "Monterrey Moment" turned "aid" into "investments-in-people" and "old supplicants" into new "partners" to fight corruption... the momentous Millennium Challenge announcement, where we stood with Cardinal McCarrick in Washington... It signalled a new kind of relationship... two-way, robust, fast tracking the bright sparks. We shouldn't forget just how much of a conceptual breakthrough this was.

I think the Millennium Challenge could be the model for this year's G8 push... while the office has been slow to open and money not out the door the way we'd like, the tough-but-fair approach is one that Americans, when they understand it, appreciate and applaud.

Next year is critical, your leadership vital. Somebody needs to bang the table and say this doesn't have to be so.... History belongs to people who refute the accepted norms, who describe what others cannot see ... Dr King saying, "we will cross the bridge at Selma"... Ronald Reagan saying "Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall".... You can show a vision of

what might be. Extreme and stupid poverty where children die for lack of a cheap immunization or clean water will one day look as ridiculous as segregation. This generation of young Americans knows how important the War against Terror is but from what I see they don't want to be defined by it alone. The world knows what America is against... your trip to Africa, with half the cabinet, offered a clue as to what America can be for...

...The next steps in the journey of Equality.

"There are no second class citizen's in the human race"

Democracy, fair trade, the sharing of technological advances... the strong side-by-side with the weak... not just because it is smart and strategic (which it is) but because it defines us afresh.

The greatest country on earth should not be last in looking after "the least of these"... Even after the proposed Millennium Challenge and your historic AIDS spending, the U.S. is 'per capita' bottom of the class of twenty OECD countries in contributing to the poorest of the poor (no. 15 if you include private philanthropy).

I've not met an American who knows this fact and is proud of it. You, Mr President have started to turn this around... as my friend Bob Geldof told the world last year, "the biggest increase in spending in forty years". I implore you to continue on this trajectory despite the very real pressures the Treasury is under with the War, the deficit etc. It is God's work. We know Africa and the developing world needs itas a fan, I think America needs it.

As I travel through the US speaking at high schools and colleges, churches and rock shows talking about Extreme Poverty I have discovered just how much Americans long to be reconnected to the original ideas that formed your great country, ideas that were out of fashion like duty, the sacred value of a life ... how sacrifices can have huge effect for people you might never meet but are forever connected to.

Whenever I speak to Dr Rice, Josh Bolten or Karl they always tell me this President doesn't make decisions based on pollsters, but on what he feels is right. In '63, when J.F.K. promised to put a man on the moon before the end of the decade there was no polling telling him this was on America's mind. He led and the world followed. Right now, more than ever before, the world needs to be reminded of our ideals, our beliefs, the foundationstones of our Western civilisation....for this we don't have to go to the moon... I say this is your moment to put man back on earth.

Thank you for taking the time with me ...I know you don't have to. All the very best to you and yours for the New Year.

*special hello to you guys
Barbara & Jenn*

RJMo.