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CONSTITUENCY FOR AFRICA

TOWN MEETING ON AFRICA

"RESPONDING TO THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC IN AFRICA"

Annual Legislative Meeting

National Association of Black County Officials
National Organization of Black County Officials

Moderator

Melvin P. Foote
President & CEO
Constituency for Africa (CFA)

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Webster J. Guillory
Chairman
National Organization of Black County Officials
(NOBCO)

Speakers

"The Impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa"

Dr. Helene Gayle
Director for the National Center for
HIV, STD, and TB Prevention
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta, Georgia

"AIDS in Africa -- A Shared Responsibility, an Enhanced Response"

Sandra L. Thurman
Director of Office of National AIDS Policy
The White House

- Questions & Comments -

"An African Diplomatic Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis"

**H.E. Mary Kanya
Ambassador of Swaziland**

"The Challenge of AIDS Orphans in Africa"

**Rhoi Wangila
Executive Director
Ark Foundation of Africa**

- Questions & Comments -

H.R. 2765: "The AIDS Marshall Plan for Africa"

**Sean Peterson
Staff Director and Administrator
Office of Congresswomen Barbara Lee (D-CA)**

"Strategy for Legislative Response"

**Brian Woolfolk
Mattox Woolfolk, LLC**

- Questions & Comments -

Closing Remarks

**Roy C. Brooks
Chairman
National Association of Black County Officials
(NABCO)**

Sandra L. Thurman
Director
Office of National AIDS Policy
'AIDS in Africa – A Shared Responsibility, An Enhanced Response'
Constituency for Africa/National Organization of Black County Officials
February 18, 2000

Thank you Melvin and good afternoon everyone.

My thanks to the Constituency for Africa and to the National Organization of Black County Officials for inviting me to speak with you all today – and for the much needed attention you have given to this vitally important issue of AIDS in Africa. We are now at a critical juncture in our battle against AIDS in the world -- and as I look around this room, I am encouraged to see many of the key partners who will play a crucial role in our shared response to the AIDS crisis.

Nearly two years ago, President Clinton traveled to Africa to help Americans and Africans begin to see each other through new eyes. He went to reach out to our brothers and sisters in Africa, and to create together a bold new partnership for the new millennium.

Beyond the old stereotypes and policies of paternalism, our shared vision is one of hope and empowerment, of democracy and freedom. It is a vision born of more than just compassion. It is a vision born of the realization that we are a global community with a shared destiny. And in this global community, both crisis and opportunity have no borders.

As Africa stands on the brink of a new day, the threat of AIDS looms large.

If we are determined to hold fast to our new vision for the 21st century – we must commit today to join forces in an all-out war on a common enemy. That enemy is AIDS.

AIDS is a plague of biblical proportion – and it is killing more people than all of the wars on the continent – combined.

AIDS is now the leading cause of death among all people of all ages in Africa. The progression of this pandemic has outpaced all of our projections. In 1991 the World Health Organization predicted that by 1999 there would be 9 million infected and nearly 5 million deaths in Africa due to AIDS. The resulting numbers are *two to three times* higher with nearly 24 million infected and 14 million deaths.

And yet the epidemic rages on. Each and every day Africa buries 5,500 men women and children as a result of AIDS – and by 2005, Africa will bury nearly 13,000 every day.

In a host of different ways and from a variety of different vantagepoints, it is the children who are caught in the crossfire of this relentless epidemic, and who are crying out for our help. The next generation is indeed in jeopardy.

In many communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS has virtually wiped out parents and providers, leaving behind children and grandparents to care for each other.

In some countries, between one-fifth and one-third of all children have already been orphaned by AIDS. And the worst is yet come. Within the next decade, more than 40 million children in Africa will have lost one or both parents to AIDS – 95% of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. 40 million. That is about the same number as all children in the United States living east of the Mississippi River. Or taken another way, it is almost the same number as all children in public school in this country. Left unchecked, this tragedy will continue to escalate for at least another 30 years.

We must remember that AIDS is not just a health issue – it is a fundamental development issue, an economic issue, a trade issue, and a key security and stability issue.

In just a few short years, AIDS has wiped out decades of hard work and steady progress in development – and as the President mentioned yesterday – will soon double infant mortality, triple child mortality, and slash life expectancy by 20 years or more. And AIDS has had a devastating impact on economic growth – striking down skilled workers in their prime and forcing many companies to hire two employees for every one job – assuming that one will die of AIDS.

Not since the bubonic plague of the Middle Ages has the world witnessed such devastation from a single disease, and the worst is yet to come. The sad truth is that we are at the beginning of an epidemic – what we see in Africa is just the tip of the iceberg.

Yet my message to you today is not one of hopelessness and desolation. For amidst this tragedy is hope. Amidst this crisis is opportunity; the opportunity to empower women, to protect children, and to support families and communities in our battle against AIDS.

Together, we have designed model programs and proven that they work. And today, we know how to stem the rising tide of new infections, how to provide basic care to those who are sick, and how to mobilize communities to support the growing number of children orphaned by AIDS. But there is more, much more that needs to be done if we are to bring these successes to scale.

During the past year and a half, I have made four trips to eight African countries at the request of President Clinton. Together with leaders from Congress and the private sector, we went to bear witness to the AIDS emergency and to search for ways to enhance our understanding and support for sustainable solutions springing up across Africa. In response to the findings of these trips, the Administration has launched a broad new initiative, the centerpiece of which is a \$100 million investment in the FY2000 budget.

This is the largest ever increase in US support for fighting the global battle against AIDS. It will more than double our investment in HIV prevention and AIDS care in Africa – finally a budget that begins to reflect the magnitude of this rapidly escalating pandemic. While this is just a first step, it is an essential foundation for progress. UNAIDS estimates that we need at least one billion a year to adequately address HIV prevention in Africa, and another one billion to start to address the care and support needs of those already infected.

In January, Vice President Gore opened the first-ever United Nations Security Council session on a health issue by addressing the AIDS crisis in Africa. He announced the Administration's request to Congress for an additional \$100 million to further enhance our efforts against AIDS in Africa and around the globe.

But the United States government cannot and should not do this alone. It is for this reason that we are taking steps to increase our coordination with multi-lateral institutions, the private sector, and the many NGOs working in the most heavily impacted regions. We will also include the AIDS epidemic in our foreign policy dialogue to encourage political leadership in countries hardest hit, and we will challenge our G-7 partners to match our increased commitment.

I want to make it very clear today – our battle against AIDS will be won or lost based on our ability to build the partnerships and solidarity necessary to support constructive action. As we struggle to move forward together – the futures of the children and families devastated by AIDS compel us all to find ways to do better, to be smarter, to move faster, and to develop whatever capacity we lack, so we can gear up for the long haul.

Luckily, painful experience here at home has taught us some valuable lessons, and we should take them to heart.

First, in reality, we are much more alike than we are different. And while we must celebrate our diversity – there is much we can learn from each other. As President Clinton said here at the Summit yesterday, "We can make it clear to our African partners that we consider AIDS not just their burden but ours as well."

Second, leadership matters.

Leadership from the very top – all the way to the community level.

Uganda is a great example. President Museveni has been a strong and effective leader in the fight against AIDS. In partnership with communities and donor nations, Uganda has cut the rate of HIV by more than half – and has organized model programs for HIV counseling and testing, and AIDS care and support. In Senegal as well, early leadership and mobilization has kept their AIDS prevalence low. In the final analysis – there is simply no substitute for real and committed leadership.

Third, this fight requires an investment – of time, energy and resources. Money, while desperately needed, is not enough.

Fourth, we pay a heavy price for the stigma that surrounds AIDS.

We must lift the shroud of secrecy that surrounds AIDS, so that individuals and families living with AIDS will no longer be forced to suffer in silence. For years in America, AIDS remained underground, and people living with AIDS lost their jobs, their homes, their health insurance, and their dignity to the fear mongering and finger pointing of others. Leadership, education, and expansion of civil rights laws can help to bring AIDS into the light, where it can be seen and combated. We must learn to fight AIDS – not people with AIDS.

And finally, partnerships among all sectors are essential. As I said earlier, AIDS is not just a health problem – it is a development problem, a trade problem, and a security problem.

AIDS is everyone's problem – and everyone must be part of the solution.

Much has been said and written about each of these lessons.

The fact is ***we know what works***. It is now time for us to move from paper to practice – and from words to deeds.

Together, we must find ways to affirm that we are a global community and our battle against AIDS in America, in Africa, and around the world is a shared responsibility.

Together, we must join our voices and pool our skills and our resources to begin to keep pace with an epidemic that is out of control.

This is a time of great challenge. The destiny of millions of people hang in the balance. Your experience, perseverance and hard work on this issue are desperately needed. I pray that each of us can leave this town meeting more confident in our commitment, more invigorated by an expanding partnership, and more energized by our determination to doing everything that we can do to win the battle against AIDS.

As we stand at the beginning of the new millennium, let us commit together to build from this tragedy, a foundation for hope, a legacy of compassion, and a real partnership forged by real solidarity in this shared struggle.

In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “Let us wage this holy war together, and for the sake of our children, let us win.”