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Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records

Subgroup/Office of Origin: National AIDS Policy Office

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Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 21063

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USIS [United States Information Service]

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USIS Washington File

23 March 1999

PRESIDENTIAL FACT-FINDING MISSION TO EXAMINE HIV-AIDS IN AFRICA

(Will visit Zambia, Uganda, South Africa) (910)
By Charles W. Corey
USIA Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- By the year 2010, a projected 40 million children are expected to be orphaned by the HIV/AIDS disease worldwide -- and the vast majority of those children will be living in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sandy Thurman, President Clinton's director of the National Office on AIDS Policy, made that observation in a March 23 interview with the United States Information Agency. Thurman spoke to USIA as she prepared to lead a March 27-April 5 fact-finding mission to assess the impact the disease has had on children in Zambia, Uganda and South Africa.

Thurman said the trip is in fact a "presidential fact-finding mission" because on World AIDS Day last year, Clinton dedicated \$10 million to look at the issue of children orphaned or at risk by HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Among her party will be U.S. Representatives Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick [Democrat-Michigan]; Barbara Lee [Democrat-California]; Sheila Jackson-Lee [Democrat-Texas] and; Eddie Bernice Johnson [Democrat-Texas]

Asked why the delegation will visit the aforementioned nations, she said that those countries were picked for "very specific reasons."

Zambia, she explained, "does not have the long history of leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS that Uganda does."

"We wanted to take members of Congress and other leaders to see where the challenges are greatest," she added, "and that is in a country [like Zambia] that is not wealthy and does not have a large infrastructure."

Uganda, on the other hand, is a nation that stands as "the model program not only for Africa, but the world -- in helping to stem the tide of this epidemic," she said.

Thurman praised the Ugandan government for its "extraordinary leadership" in implementing "wonderful and aggressive prevention campaigns," against the killer disease, and as such, "we want to give people the opportunity to see what works."

Finally, Thurman said, the delegation will travel to South Africa, to see "a country that is really just beginning to grapple" with the disease and see if we can't find ways to help them to cope with it.

Thurman acknowledged that the United States has a "long history of involvement" in fighting the disease. It will invest \$76 million on HIV-AIDS prevention efforts in sub-Saharan Africa this year, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. National Institutes of

Health.

Thurman said her delegation will be "looking at programs that are run at the community level, primarily -- some that are run by the U.S., some that are not" to identify what of them that "we might be able to support and what we might be able to duplicate" elsewhere.

Thurman noted that by the turn of this century, the United States itself will have some 125,000 American children that are expected to be orphaned by AIDS, "so it is a challenge that we share and" as such, "we are looking for best practices."

Commenting on the impact HIV/AIDS has had on Africa's economic growth and development, Thurman said "What we are beginning to see, and what I think people are beginning to understand, is that HIV/AIDS is not a health issue. It is a development issue. It is (also) a finance...trade... and security issue.

"When you look at many countries now having almost one in four people infected -- the majority of which are of working age (20-40) -- it begins to have a significant impact on economic growth across the board," she explained.

For instance, Thurman said life expectancy in South Africa in the next few years is expected to decline from 60 years to 40 years as a result of HIV/AIDS -- "and that is true throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

"So what we are seeing as a result of this epidemic is that we are losing almost all of the gains that we have made in life expectancy," she said. "We are losing much of the ground that we gained in infant child mortality and morbidity; so this is... about the health of nations, not just the health of people."

Asked to compare HIV/AIDS rates in sub-Saharan Africa to other regions of the world, Thurman said, "Africa and the United States began early on to grapple with this epidemic.

"India," a country from which Thurman recently visited, "is just now really feeling the impact of the AIDS epidemic, as are some of the states of the former Soviet Union. So India is now where the epidemic is exploding fastest.

"I think as we look towards the future," she continued, "India and other parts of Asia as well will be suffering from this epidemic. Just like Africa is today if we don't identify ways to stop it and share the experience" and knowledge accrued "with our partners all around the world."

Concluding, Thurman reiterated that AIDS is not just about health per se. "This is a development issue, this is a trade issue, this is an economic issue and in order for us to do anything about this, we have got to" devise a joint strategy involving "all sectors of government and society, including the private and public sector."

Upon return, Thurman noted, her delegation will be forwarding a report to President Clinton for follow-up action.

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LUSAKA 1676

SENSITIVE - Incable Number 04276597

From: AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
Subject: Q AND A'S FOR THURMAN
DELEGATION

MRN: 1676

Date/Time: 231528Z MAR 99

Class: Unclassified - (Sensitive) Precedence: PRIORITY

Private Notes:

-- No Private Notes --

Cable Text:

INFO: BVA-01 AF-01 AMAD-01 ARC-01 BG-01 BVOA-01 I-01 DC-01 IGA-01
IGAF-01 DO-01

----- AMADS AMADS 082/1630Z (TOTAL COPIES: 11)

ACTION AF-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-08 ACDE-00 AID-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 SRPP-00
ED-01 UTED-00 HHS-01 H-01 IM-01 SSA-01 TEDE-00
INR-00 L-01 ADS-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OES-01 OMB-01
PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 SP-00 SS-00 TRSE-00
USIE-00 PMB-00 DRL-02 G-00 SAS-00 /019W

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FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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INFO AMEMBASSY KAMPALA

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

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TAGS: SOCI, TBIO, ZA

SUBJECT: Q AND A'S FOR THURMAN DELEGATION

1. SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

2. AS NOTED IN REFTELS, EMBASSY LUSAKA ROPOSES PRESS
EVENT AT AIRPORT UPON ARRIVAL AND UPON DEPARTURE FOR
THURMAN DELEGATION MEMBERS. UPON ARRIVAL, IN ADDITION
TO ANSWERING QUESTIONS, THE GROUP WILL BE ABLE TO
ANNOUNCE A NEW INCREMENT OF A MILLION DOLLARS FOR
HIV/AIDS ACTIVITIES IN ZAMBIA. THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS
AND ANSWERS ARE OFFERED AS BASIC PRESS GUIDANCE. WHEN
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE DELEGATION IS
AVAILABLE, THE EMBASSY WILL PREPARE A BACKGROUND PRESS
STATEMENT FOR DISTRIBUTION. PLEASE ADVISE IF
ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE IS DESIRED PRIOR TO ARRIVAL:

Q: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TRIP?

A: WE ARE HERE AT THE REQUEST OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES TO SEE FIRST HAND HOW THE AIDS EPIDEMIC
IS AFFECTING CHILDREN IN ZAMBIA. WE ARE PARTICULARLY
INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT CHILDREN ORPHANED BY
AIDS.

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WE ARE ALSO PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS INCREASED FUNDING FOR HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND MITIGATION EFFORTS IN ZAMBIA BY A MILLION DOLLARS FOR THIS YEAR. THIS NEW ASSISTANCE IS ESPECIALLY DIRECTED AT MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AT RISK.

Q: WHAT IS THE VIEW OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS AGAINST THE POST JOURNALISTS?

A: NOTE: IN MID MARCH THE GOVERNMENT DETAINED A NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS FROM THE POST NEWSPAPER, ZAMBIA'S LEADING OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER, INCLUDING THE PAPER'S EDITOR IN CHIEF. THE DETENTION FOLLOWED A STORY IN THE POST WHICH PROVIDED DETAILS ABOUT ZAMBIA'S DEFENSE POSTURE. AFTER A HABEUS CORPUS HEARING THE JOURNALISTS WERE RELEASED. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE STATE HAS TAKEN STEPS TO CHARGE THE JOURNALISTS WITH ESPIONAGE. THE JOURNALISTS ARE CURRENTLY FREE ON BAIL. THERE IS CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE USING ITS STATE POWERS TO CHILL THE ENVIRONMENT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE:

THE UNITED STATES STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE PRESS IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. WE VIEW WITH DEEP CONCERN MEASURES WHICH MAY UNDULY RESTRICT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. WE WILL BE FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS CASE WITH CLOSE INTEREST.

Q: IS PRESIDENT CLINTON GOING TO FORGIVE ZAMBIA'S DEBTS TO THE UNITED STATES?

A: THE PRESIDENT HAS ANNOUNCED A NEW INITIATIVE TO ACCELERATE FAVORABLE DEBT REDUCTION TREATMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC AFRICAN NATIONS WHICH ARE UNDERTAKING CONSISTENT, TRANSPARENT AND BOLD PROGRAMS OF ECONOMIC REFORM. WE HOPE THAT ZAMBIA WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR THIS INITIATIVE.

Q: IS THE UNITED STATES CONCERNED ABOUT ZAMBIA'S RELATIONS WITH ANGOLA?

A: NOTE: RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN INCREASED TENSION BETWEEN ANGOLA AND ZAMBIA, IN LARGE PART DUE TO ANGOLAN ACCUSATIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA TOLERATED THE SHIPMENT OF WEAPONS AND OTHER MATERIAL THROUGH ZAMBIA TO UNITA REBELS. THE GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA HAS DENIED THESE ALLEGATIONS. WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE:

WE ENCOURAGE THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF ANGOLA TO ENGAGE IN AN OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT ISSUES OF MUTUAL CONCERN.

Q: DOES THE UNITED STATES SUPPORT PRESIDENT CHILUBA'S MEDIATION EFFORTS IN THE CONGO CRISIS

A: THE UNITED STATES WELCOMES PRESIDENT CHILUBA'S POSITIVE EFFORTS TO PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN MEDIATING THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN THE CONGO.

Q: ARE YOU BRINGING US ANYTHING?

A: GLOBALLY, THE US GOVERNMENT, THROUGH USAID, PROVIDES OVER 125 MILLION DOLLARS TO COMBAT THE

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HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC. IN ZAMBIA, USAID IS SPENDING ABOUT THREE MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR ON THIS EFFORT, INCLUDING ASSISTANCE TO ORPHANED CHILDREN. TODAY WE ARE ADDING A MILLION DOLLARS TO THAT TOTAL. THE NEW LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE WILL BE FOUR MILLION DOLLARS THIS YEAR.

THE CONGRESS CONTINUES TO ENCOURAGE THE ADMINISTRATION TO INCREASE ITS EFFORTS. THE CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT ARE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN BETTER ASSISTING CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD WHO ARE AFFECTED BY THE AIDS EPIDEMIC. WE HOPE THAT THIS TRIP WILL HELP US IDENTIFY NEW ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Q: WHAT IS THE USG POSITION ON THE USE OF CONDOMS

A: WE BELIEVE THAT THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF HIV IS THROUGH CHANGING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR. THIS CAN MEAN A NUMBER OF THINGS, FOR EXAMPLE, ABSTINENCE, HAVING FEWER PARTNERS, AND USING CONDOMS CORRECTLY AND CONSISTENTLY.

Q: WHAT CAN THE USG DO FOR AIDS ORPHANS? WILL YOU BUILD ORPHANAGES?

A: WE BELIEVE THAT THE BEST WAY TO ASSIST ORPHANS IS TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES THAT ARE CARING FOR THEM. COMMUNITY-BASED CARE IS MUCH MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN THE CARE THAT CAN BE PROVIDED IN AN INSTITUTION

Q: HOW MUCH MONEY WILL ZAMBIA GET TO COMBAT AIDS?

A: FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR (FY99), USAID/ZAMBIA IS DEVOTING MORE THAN \$3.21 MILLION DOLLARS ON HIV/AIDS PREVENTION, CARE AND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES. TODAY, WE ARE ADDING A MILLION DOLLARS OF NEW RESOURCES TO THIS SUPPORT.

Q: WHAT IS THE UNITED STATES STAND ON GAY RIGHTS?

NOTE: THE QUESTION OF HOMOSEXUAL CIVIL RIGHTS HAS BEEN A HOTLY CONTESTED PUBLIC ISSUE HERE AND HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT FOR RESIDENT DIPLOMATS WHO HAVE SPOKEN ON THE ISSUE. ON OCTOBER 18, PRESIDENT CHILUBA PUBLICLY SPOKE OUT AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT YOU MAY BE ASKED THE U.S. POSITION ON HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS. IF SUCH A QUESTION IS POSED, WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU DISCRETELY MOVE ON TO THE NEXT APPOINTMENT IF THE TIMING IS APPROPRIATE- IF SUCH AN EXIT STRATEGY IS NOT POSSIBLE, WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE:

A: THE UNITED STATES IS OPPOSED TO DISCRIMINATION. THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUAL CIVIL RIGHTS IS SOMETHING THAT REMAINS A SOURCE OF WIDESPREAD DEBATE IN OUR COUNTRY. HOWEVER, EVERYONE IS OPPOSED TO RHETORIC THAT MAY LEAD TO THE VICTIMIZATION OF INDIVIDUALS

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE GRZ EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH HIV/AIDS?

A: WE ALL KNOW THAT THE PROBLEM IN ZAMBIA IS VERY, VERY SERIOUS. CLEARLY, IT EFFECTS EVERY ASPECT OF ZAMBIAN SOCIETY. ALL OF US NEED TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE.

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DURING OUR EARLIER TRIP TO ZAMBIA WE WERE IMPRESSED BY THE DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT OF THE MANY ZAMBIANS WHO ARE WORKING ON THIS ISSUE. WITH LIMITED RESOURCES, COMMUNITIES, GOVERNMENT AND OTHERS ARE ALL WORKING HARD TO DEAL WITH THE CRISIS. THESE EFFORTS ARE LAUDABLE.

WE ALL NEED TO RESIST FATIGUE IN THE FACE OF THIS EPIDEMIC. POLITICAL LEADERS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED TO REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO PUBLICLY DISCUSS THE SITUATION, THE ISSUES SURROUNDING HIV/AIDS, TO CREATE A DEEPER AWARENESS OF THE PLIGHT OF AIDS ORPHANS, AND TO DISCUSS POLICIES THAT WILL ENHANCE HIV/AIDS PREVENTION, CARE AND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES IN ZAMBIA.
RENDER

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