

White House Convening on
AIDS in Africa
9/7/99

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White House Convening on AIDS in Africa
Welcoming Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

The White House
September 7, 1999

I want to start by thanking all of you for being here. You may recall that back in July the Vice President announced the Administration's request for \$100 million on behalf of our government's efforts to combat the pandemic of AIDS. We also announced a series of meetings, of which this is one. There will be a number of others as well.

We are joined today by leaders from the Administration, international organizations, foundations, businesses, and grassroots AIDS activists. The people around this table are a testament to the impact of the AIDS pandemic and the effect it has on every sector of society and every (inaudible) ... Also, the responsibility... (inaudible)

It is my hope that this meeting will lead to new initiatives, new resources, new thinking, and new partnerships to fight – and ultimately win – the war against HIV/AIDS in Africa and around the world.

Every day, we are reminded of the breakthroughs that we've had in this fight– from drug therapies that are improving life to education campaigns that are empowering people to prevent this disease. We know what works. But, we also know that far too many people are still being left behind.

Just a week ago in Atlanta, we heard that the rate of HIV infections is no longer declining in the United States. And, each and every day, AIDS claims the lives of more than 5,500 men, women, and children in Africa. In the next few years, that number will more than double. The AIDS epidemic in Africa is a crisis of biblical proportions. We are facing an emergency. And what we see in Africa today, we will likely see one day in India, in Southeast Asia, and the Newly Independent States if we do not act now.

In Uganda, I saw firsthand what can be accomplished when the governments and citizens join forces to beat this disease. I went to the AIDS Information Center and saw countless billboards educating people to protect themselves against AIDS. I remember a song that had been sung in the information center: The song's theme is that Ugandans are fighting to ensure that AIDS cannot win. And this entire government citizens' campaign is working. From 1992 to 1998, the percentage of sexually active teenage girls who were HIV positive declined by almost two thirds.

That example was on the minds of the African health ministers who came together last week at a W.H.O. meeting in Namibia. They declared war on HIV/AIDS and made a commitment to stop the devastation plaguing their citizens and countries. And I hope and pray that the United States will work hand in hand with these governments and citizens.

Because AIDS is not somebody else's problem. Our work against this deadly disease must be part of all our development efforts – especially those affecting women and children. Because, as we speak, the AIDS epidemic is turning back the clock on the development we have seen taking place in Africa. It is undermining entire economies, trade, civil society, and the stability that was so hard fought for by those nations. It is decreasing life expectancy by up to 20 years in some countries and turning millions and millions of children into orphans.

I know that the people around this table and in this room have worked tirelessly to make great progress in the battle against AIDS. But, we have a lot more that we need to do today.

That is why I am pleased to be joined by leaders of the United States including the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala; the Secretary of the Treasury Larry Summers; our new USAID Administrator Brady Anderson; our Surgeon General, Dr. David Satcher; the Undersecretary of State, Frank Loy; Leon Fuerth, the Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs; and Sandy Thurman, the Director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy.

The Administration starting with the Vice President's call more than a month ago has asked for an additional \$100 million next year to fight the global battle against AIDS. This new initiative represents the largest increase ever in the international AIDS budget. And it would allow us to more than double our efforts in sub-Saharan Africa.

We can also take heart in the recent Cologne Agreement, which will more than double the debt relief provided to countries that would help the countries that need it the most. This means that eligible nations such as Uganda and Tanzania will now be allowed to use their freed up resources on social sector spending – including, for the first time, activities to prevent HIV/AIDS. We will work with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and UNAIDS to encourage Uganda, Tanzania, and other eligible countries to develop HIV/AIDS pilot projects.

I am very pleased that we are joined by key representatives from multilateral organizations, including Jim Wolfenson and Jan Piercy from the World Bank and Peter Piot from UNAIDS. And we will hear from him about the work that UN agencies are doing to combat AIDS around the world, and that reminded me of yet one more reason why the United States should pay our dues to the United Nations.

We are also very fortunate to have with us the National Association of People with AIDS and the Global AIDS Action Network – two non-governmental organizations that are on the frontlines.

In addition there are representatives of foundations here that have provided great leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS. I want to thank the Rockefeller Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and the Open Society Institute for their generous contributions. I also want to thank the Kaiser Family Foundation, which comes here today with a new

commitment to match funding dedicated to preventing AIDS among adolescents in South Africa. And I want to thank the MacArthur Foundation, which will be bringing foundations together at the end of this year to discuss even more ways that they help meet this challenge.

I am also pleased to be joined by representatives of the private sector. Robert Johnson from Black Entertainment Television who will use his network to (inaudible) and Bristol Myers Squibb, who are making great contributions – but also reminding us of critical role that businesses has to play...??.

Because just imagine what we could accomplish if, over the next few years, we could bring to this table every business, government leader, foundation, NGO, multilateral organization, and citizen who wants to be part of meeting the challenge ... by HIV/AIDS(inaudible)

We can never give up until we finally meet our ultimate goal – and find a cure that reaches every single man, woman, and child. But, until then, we must do all we can in our power to prevent HIV and heal those it strikes in Africa and all over the world. It is my great pleasure to have you here and to be part of this discussion and more than that to be part of this (inaudible) We hope that the United States ???????

And I hope that over the next hour or so we will think creatively about the ways that we can work together to do just that.