
Vitamin A Deficiency
Ronald Reagan Building, DC
March 16, 1999

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

VITAMIN A DEFICIENCY INITIATIVE
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C.

Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
March 16, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you. I am really delighted to be here to see all of you from the public and private sectors joined together on behalf of this important initiative. I want to thank Brian Atwood for his extraordinary leadership of USAID through some challenging times. They have not always been the easiest assignments over the last six-plus years, but he has carried it out with real dedication, commitment and resolve. So it's really an enormous pleasure for me to travel on behalf of our government visiting countries that are struggling to establish strong democracies to create economic opportunities and expand freedoms in education and every area, and to know that through USAID we are playing a part in that.

I still want to acknowledge Hattie Babbitt, my friend who is the Deputy Administrator and equally committed to this work. I see Congressman Tony Hall, who is one of the great goodwill ambassadors of the United States and who travels to places that are undergoing incredible humanitarian challenges and comes back to remind all of us that these are human beings who are suffering and that we should do more to alleviate that suffering. Carol Bellamy, I see, who is leading UNICEF so well, and has really done a lot to make sure that we did forge good partnerships on behalf of UNICEF's objectives to create better conditions for children around the world. I am also pleased that Dr. Estrada, the First Lady of the Philippines, could be with us -- a medical doctor, a psychiatrist, a mother, an activist who is very committed to doing what needs to be done on behalf of the children of the Philippines. And I know that Minister Marlow from Canada is also with us. There are many of you representing other countries, and I am particularly pleased that we have such a big turnout of corporate partners who understand how significant this effort is.

As you know so well, we see an estimated 12 million children die tragically every year from malnutrition. And we know that Vitamin A deficiency accounts for at least a million deaths and many cases of blindness around the world. In my travels I have seen the results of malnutrition, I have seen the results of Vitamin A deficiency. And the Vitamin A deficiency is a particularly difficult problem, because oftentimes parents do not know that their children are deficient. They are unaware that this silent killer or blinder of their children is at work. They don't know what they can do about it, and they often don't seek help until it is too late. But what we are attempting to do now is what some of you have already done and know we can do more of, and that is by providing capsules and fortifying foods all through the world. We can also help people by teaching officials, and community leaders, parents, teachers, and citizens from all walks of life, about this silent killer and do what we can to help them help their own children. USAID realized very quickly that no single agency could carry this out alone. We knew that it would take a concerted effort from all of you in is this room and the many people that you

represent. It will take money of course, but it won't take so much money as will. And the kind of human resources to see that objectives are set in motion and then a plan to realize that objective. Many of you here today are pioneers in the field of Vitamin A -- in research, in foreign program assistance, in food fortification, and in the promotion of healthy eating habits and behaviors. Now it's clear that if we're going to accomplish our goals of reducing Vitamin A deficiency worldwide, we need a partnership like the one represented in this room that can truly make a global difference in the lives of millions of children. The challenge is how we commit ourselves to this effort. We agree to work together to develop innovative ideas and products and systems that reach the most vulnerable children. And what we are asking all of you is to join with us in a very public commitment to help mobilize not just public resources, but more importantly, private market forces that can be brought to bear on this particular challenge.

I am very pleased that today we will collectively sign a declaration signifying that joint commitment. A commitment that, on paper, will state that we intend to reduce Vitamin A deficiency worldwide. But beyond signing the commitment, I hope that all of us will challenge ourselves with a further step. By this time next year, I hope -- and I guess I challenge me as well as you -- to ensure that we have developed the concrete activities and products that can be brought to bear on target countries haunted by Vitamin A deficiency issues. And I am asking that each of us, in our own way, commit to the actions that we can take, individually and through the organizations represented here, to save the lives of millions of children. I am very pleased that I have been asked to sign this document. And I do so both with a great sense of hope that we will actually fulfill what we are talking about today. But also with a pledge to you that it won't be just a signature on a document, but that I will do what I can, in cooperation with USAID and the other agencies represented here and our corporate partners, to make this global alliance that we are hoping to create a reality in the next year.

Now I would invite everyone who is going to either sign or be part of this agreement, Brian, to join us up here so that we can launch this global effort and begin to try to do what we need to do to make it come off successfully.

Thank you very much.