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President Discusses the Fight Against Global and Domestic HIV/AIDS

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming. I'm honored you all are here. I'm so grateful that many from the diplomatic corps are here.

This is an historic year for America. It's a year of great consequence. It's a year in which we have an opportunity to work with others to shape the future of our globe. We have a chance to achieve peace. We have a chance to achieve a more compassionate world for every citizen. America believes deeply that everybody has worth, everybody matters, everybody was created by the Almighty, and we're going to act on that belief and we'll act on that passion.



You know, the world looks at us and says, they're strong. And we are; we're strong militarily. But we've got a greater strength than that. We've got a strength in the universality of human rights and the human condition. It's in our country's history. It's ingrained in our soul. And today we're going to describe how we're going to act -- not just talk, but act, on the basis of our firm beliefs.

I want to thank Tommy, he's the new chairman of the board of the Global Fund. He's also the Secretary of Health and Human Services, doing a great job for our administration. I want to thank so very much the ambassadors from Guyana and Uganda for standing up here with us today. I appreciate the other ambassadors from the continent of Africa and the Caribbean for being here.

With us as well is Bill Frist, a United States Senator, Majority Leader, passionate advocate of good health care for every citizen on the globe; a man with whom this administration will work, along with Russ Feingold, from Wisconsin, to make sure that the proposal becomes real. That means funded. (Laughter and applause.)

There's no doubt in my mind that when you've got the Majority Leader and a distinguished senator like Senator Feingold teaming up together, that this will get done. It's just a matter of time.

I'm honored that Mark Malloch is here -- Mark Malloch Brown is here, who is the U.N. -- administrator of U.N. develop program. I want to thank the U.S. Surgeon General, Carmona is here with us. Rich, thank you for coming. Andrew Natsios is USAID administrator. Dr. Zerhouni of NIH is with us. Tony Fauci is here with us. There are a lot of docs here today. (Laughter.) Julie Gerberding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Thank you, all, for coming today. Les Crawford is the deputy commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration.

And, of course, a man who is on my staff who is going to make an enormous difference here and abroad as direct advisor to the President, and that's Dr. Joe O'Neill, who's the director of National AIDS Policy. He's about as fine a human being as you'll ever know. He cares deeply and his care has had -- he's got a lot of influence, let me put it to you this way, because of his convictions.

As I mentioned, we're a strong nation. But we're also a blessed nation. And it's important for our citizens to recognize that richness is one thing. Recognizing that we're blessed gives a different perspective, I think. I think it enhances the fact that we have a responsibility. If you're blessed, there is a responsibility to recognize your blessings in a compassionate way. Blessings are a two-way street. We've got to understand in this country that if you value life and say every life is equal, that includes a suffering child on the continent of Africa. If you're worried about freedom, that's just not freedom for your neighbor in America, that's freedom for people around the globe. It's a universal principle.

As I said in my State of the Union, freedom is not America's gift to the world, freedom is God's gift to humanity. Freedom means freedom from a lot of things. And today, on Africa, in the continent of Africa, freedom means freedom from the fear of a deadly pandemic. That's what we think in America. And we're going to act on that belief. The founding belief in human dignity should be how we conduct ourselves around the world -- and will be how we conduct ourselves around the world.

I want you all to remember, and our fellow citizens to remember, that this is nothing new for our country. Human dignity has been a part of our history for a long time. We fed the hungry after World War I. This country carried out the Marshall Plan and the Berlin Airlift.

Today we provide 60 percent -- over 60 percent of all the international food aid. We're acting on our compassion. It's nothing new for our country. But there's a pandemic which we must address now, before it is too late. And that's why I took this message to our fellow citizens, that now is the time for this country to step up our efforts to save lives. After all, on the continent of Africa, 30 million people have the AIDS virus -- 30 million people. Three million children under the age of 15 have the AIDS virus. More than 4 million people require immediate drug treatment. Yet, just about 1 percent of people receive drug treatment. It is a significant world problem that the United States of America can do something about. We can be involved.

Tommy mentioned the images, the horrible images, that take place in Africa. It's important for our fellow citizens as they listen to the dialogue on this initiative to understand that there are mass burials and unmarked graves on the continent of Africa. So many people are dying. But the graves are unmarked. The pandemic is creating such havoc that there are mass burials, that there are wards of children that are dying because of AIDS. Not a ward, not some wards, but wards after wards full of dying children because of AIDS. That there are millions of orphans, lonely children, because their mom or dad has died -- children left, in some cases, to fend for themselves.

Because the AIDS diagnosis is considered a death sentence, many folks don't seek treatment, and that's a reality. It's as if the AIDS pandemic just continues to feed upon itself over and over and over again, because of hopelessness. This country needs to provide some hope -- because this disease can be prevented and it can be treated, that's important for our fellow citizens to know. Anti-retroviral drugs are now dramatically more affordable in many nations, and these drugs are used to extend the lives of those with HIV. In other words, these drugs are really affordable.

And when the treatment has come to Africa, it is also important for our citizens to understand the effect of that treatment. It's called the Lazarus effect. When one patient is rescued by medicine, as if back from the dead, many others with AIDS seek testing and treatment, because it is the first sign of hope they have ever seen.

We have the opportunity to bring that hope to millions. It's an opportunity for this nation to affect millions and millions of lives. So that's why I've laid out the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. I called it in my State of the Union a work of mercy, and that's what I believe it is.

With the approval of Congress, we will devote \$15 billion to the fight AIDS abroad over the next five years, beginning with \$2 billion in the year 2004. (Applause.) I've been asked whether or not we're committed to the Global AIDS Fund. Well, first of all, I wouldn't put Tommy as the head of it if we weren't. And more importantly, he wouldn't have joined if we weren't.

And so we're still committed to the Global AIDS Fund to fight disease. This program in no way diminishes our commitment to the fund. We will continue bilateral AIDS programs in more than 50 countries. We've already got bilateral relations with 50 countries with whom we're working on AIDS, and we'll continue that program.

But this plan that I've laid out in front of the Congress and will work with members of the Senate and the House on will dramatically focus our efforts. You notice I didn't say, "focus our efforts," I said, "dramatically focus our efforts." And that's important for the American people to understand, because we want to bring a comprehensive system. It's more than money that we bring, we bring expertise and compassion and love and the desire to develop a comprehensive system, work with people in Africa to do so, for diagnosis and treatment and prevention.

We are determined to turn the tide against AIDS. And we're going to start in 14 African and Caribbean countries, where the disease is most heavily concentrated. We whip it in those 15 -- or 14 -- we will show what is possible in other countries.

We're going to be involved with the fund. We'll continue to have bilateral aid. We want to have intense focus where the need is most severe, and show the world what is possible -- not just show our fellow citizens or show the folks on the continent of Africa, but the world needs to see what we can do together. The model has been applied with great success in Uganda. Anybody who knows the issue of AIDS on the African continent appreciates the efforts of Uganda. And we feel like that it can be duplicated. And that's the mission, the goal. Even though we're on 14 countries initially with this major focus, we understand there's suffering elsewhere, and we want to expand beyond. We want to encourage others to join us, as well.

The funding will initially go toward expanding existing hospitals, and of course, drawing on the knowledge and the expertise of local physicians. That makes sense. You've got a doc in place; we want to encourage that doc to be able to continue his or her healing. We'll build satellite facilities that can serve more people. Of course, we'll provide antiretroviral drugs, and as well, work with folks on the ground for education and care.

It's important for our citizens to know that the infrastructure is -- it's hard for many Americans to imagine the lack of infrastructure that we're working with on the continent of Africa. So we use motorcycles, trucks, bicycles. We use nurses and local healers to go to the farthest villages and farms to test for the disease and to deliver medications that will save lives. It doesn't matter how the medications get there; what matters is they do get there.

The facilities across Africa and the Caribbean will have now the medicine. And our fellow citizens must understand that the reason they do is because of your generosity, the taxpayers of the country. I hope when our citizens absorb that knowledge -- the massive attempt to save lives -- that they feel proud of their country, and proud of the compassion of America. We're going to work with other governments, of course, private groups, there's all kinds of faith-based programs involved on the continent of Africa, and we welcome that, of course. And we encourage that. And we thank you for that.

A fellow named Father Edward Phillips is here. Where are you, Father? Right there, yes. I thought you were Father Edward Phillips for a minute. (Laughter.) He is in Kenya, works in Kenya. He's obviously followed his faith. He leads an organization that provides testing and treatment in Nairobi. He's helped thousands of people every year. He ought to be giving this speech, not me, because he knows what it must feel like to play a significant role in saving lives. And that's what we're here to talk about today, how best to save lives.

And here's what the experts believe that will be accomplished, the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. In this decade, we will prevent 7 million

new infections. They will treat at least 2 million people with life-extending drugs. We'll provide humane care, of course, for those who suffer and, as importantly, for the orphans.

To me, that's just the beginning. But it's a pretty good start. Most important thing is we're providing hope, which is immeasurable. How can you possibly measure the benefits of hope? There's no -- we can't quantify that. But it certainly can be qualified by saying a hopeful society is a heck of a lot better society than what they found on the continent today.

This project is urgent, and as we move forward on this program we will continue to call upon other nations to join. The United States doesn't mind leading and we believe others have a responsibility as well, that we're not the only blessed nation. There are many blessed nations. And we hope they join us. And as well, we've got a lot of work to do here in America. It's important for our fellow citizens never to think that one initiative, or a major initiative, in Africa doesn't mean we're going to forget the 900,000 people living in America today who carry the HIV virus. Of course we'll never do that. It's important for our citizens to understand that there's 40,000 new infections every year in this country. It's an issue. It's an issue we must continue to deal with.

The AIDS diagnosis still obviously brings tremendous grief and worries in parts of our society. And so the budget I've submitted and worked with Congress on -- it will be a request for \$16 billion for domestic HIV prevention and care and treatment, a 7 percent increase over '03. (Applause.) It's a \$93 million increase for AIDS research, \$100 million more to support the AIDS drug assistance program. (Applause.) This is a program which provides funding to purchase AIDS related medicines for those without health coverage. And we're going to help those abroad and we'll help those at home, as well.

We must also move quickly to increase the number of people who are tested for HIV. How can you treat if you don't test? How can you help if you don't know? And so the Food and Drug Administration recently has approved a new HIV test, which can provide results in less than 30 minutes, with a 99.6 percent accuracy. (Applause.)

So today I've got an announcement to make, and it's this, that the Department of Health and Human Services, after a lot of careful review, has waived regulations so that the test will soon be more readily available to doctors and public health facilities throughout the country. (Applause.)

As I've said, it's going to be a significant year for our country. I'm a person who believes that there's no obstacle put in our path that we can't overcome, I truly believe that. I love what our country stands for. I love the strength of America. The strength of America really is the -- lies in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens.

As we move forward into the 21st century, there's no doubt we can help the people on the African continent, while we help our own folks at home with the deadly disease. There's no doubt we can arrest the pandemic. There's no doubt we can bring hope in all parts of the world, not only in Africa, but in neighborhoods in our own country where people wonder what the American Dream means. There's no doubt in my mind we can make the world more peaceful.

Today's initiative is one -- it's a step toward showing the world the great compassion of a great country. Thanks for coming, and God bless. (Applause.)

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