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USAID Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
Partnership: A Call to Action Conference Remarks
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Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. I know many of you have traveled quite a distance to be here, so thank you for making the effort to join us.

Many of you may not have thought of it this way, but your organizations are what make up civil society. Wikipedia defines civil society like this: “**Civil society** is composed of...voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the force-backed structures of a state (regardless of that state's political system) and commercial institutions.” According to Wikipedia, you, as civil society organizations are the organizations that bring civility to society! You form the basis of a functioning society and you make our country and others better places to live!

One thing that I have noticed is that many faith or community based organizations don't think of themselves as CSOs, but in the world of foreign aid and development, it is under that umbrella which you are given a voice. I recently traveled with Administrator Fore to be a part of the Third HLF on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana. One of the topics of discussion at the event was regarding the role of CSOs in foreign aid and development. Civil Society Organizations are beginning to see greater recognition of the vital role they play in development and USAID has been working to expand these kinds of partnerships through its faith based and community initiative.

I encourage you to tap into the networks of CSOs that have formed so that your voice can be heard by donor countries as well as beneficiary countries as they come together to discuss the future of foreign aid and development.

As some of you may know, President Bush was in this very room two weeks ago. He said to development professionals that day, “I strongly believe in the timeless truth: To whom much is given, much is required. We are a blessed nation, and I believe we have a duty to help those less fortunate around the world. We believe that power to save lives comes with the obligation to use it.”

That’s why the Faith-Based and Community Initiative is effective – its goal is to lead a determined attack on need by strengthening and expanding the role of faith and community-based organizations in providing social services. The Initiative over the past seven years has been extremely successful in reforming the complicated rules and regulations preventing faith and community-based organizations from competing for funds on an equal footing with other organizations. Ultimately, the Initiative has more effectively used tax-payer dollars and taken care of the world’s poor, who are best served when the Federal government’s partners are the providers most capable of meeting their needs. Because of the Initiative, Federal funds are awarded to the most effective organizations—whether public or private, large or small, faith-based or secular—and all may compete on a level playing field.

I was in Zambia a few months ago at a conference put on by the White House. While there, I saw firsthand the astonishing impact of this Initiative as I watched faith-based partners administer services funded by the generosity of the American people. One great example of this was God Our Help, a small faith-based organization helping to do its share in implementing the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief or PEPFAR. I won't share too much because you will hear more about them later on this morning from Bruce Wilkinson, but let me just say that I have never been so moved by the display of compassion I witnessed through this program. Watching caregivers lovingly provide help and support to those who many would have forgotten demonstrated to me why PEPFAR has been so successful. It is *because* it has implemented partnerships with small, grassroots organizations, many of which are faith-based, to accomplish its goals.

Now I know that I don't have to tell *you* that community and faith-based organizations are vital in the delivery of services here in the U.S. and around the world. Faith organizations *know* those they serve and they care deeply about them. And they are most effective because of these relationships.

Today, you will have the distinct privilege to learn from government representatives about partnership with the U.S. Government; corporate business leaders about public-private partnerships; and NGO leaders about their successes and challenges when working with each other and with the Government. You have quite a day ahead!

President-elect Obama stated a few months ago in reference to the Faith & Community Based Initiative, "The challenges we face today ... are simply too big for government to solve alone,"

I ask you:

When you think of the people who live in the most remote regions and in the most hopeless slums—who has always been there to help them?

Who already has people on the ground who are trusted by local populations?

And who will continue to be there with compassion and understanding?

The fact is that the churches, the monasteries, the temples, the mosques, and the synagogues are among those who have gone where no one else would go.

There is a growing recognition that faith and community based organizations can often move faster and more effectively than government agencies, unburdened as they are by heavy bureaucracy.

The church or other faith based organizations including traditional faith healers – can be viewed as the largest, most stable and most extensively dispersed non government organization in any country. Churches are respected within communities and most have existing resources, structures and systems upon which to build. They possess the human, physical, technical and financial resources needed to support and implement small and large scale initiatives. They can undertake these actions in a very cost effective manner due to their ability to leverage volunteers and other resources with minimal effort.

I'll close with this -- Albert Einstein once said "The significant problems we face can not be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them" I encourage you to continue to think of innovative ways that you can partner with one another, with the private sector and with the U.S. and other government agencies to provide effective and compassionate solutions to the problems we face in our world today!

Now, I'm honored to introduce to you a great friend & colleague, Jedd Medefind. Jedd is a great mentor is also one of my bosses! He directs the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and its partner Centers in eleven major Federal agencies to strengthen the work of frontline nonprofits and social entrepreneurs like you. He works to ensure faith and community-based organizations' have a role as central partners in

any Federal effort that addresses human need — everything from from addiction, homelessness, prisoner reentry, at-risk youth to global HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Prior to his current role, Jedd served as Deputy Director of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, managing the White House Office team and implementing Presidential priorities across the Federal government. He has also served as Director of the FBCI Center at the U.S. Department of Labor, and Communications Director and Chief of Staff in the California State Senate and State Assembly.

Thanks for being with us today, Jedd.