



## Vision for Africa

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### INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, and thank you all for coming. It is my honor and pleasure to welcome all of you to the first ever Africa Education Forum. As we all gather to mark the opening of the United Nation's General Assembly, it is a fitting time to take stock of all that we have accomplished this past year, and all that we aspire to in the year ahead.

Having worked for President George W. Bush for several years now, I can tell you that he is a holistic thinker, and when he thinks about foreign policy and America's role in the world, Africa is part of the equation.

Since President Bush arrived in Washington, D.C. in 2001, he has urged his staff to make the world "safer, freer, and better." Part of making the world safer and better is ensuring that families are healthy and that children have access to education. And hope -- the opportunity for children everywhere to pursue their personal dreams -- is part of realizing that better world.

### REVOLUTIONARY AFRICA POLICY

In the case of Africa, the President and his Administration have worked in partnership with the region's governments to make that vision a reality. He has demonstrated bold leadership, and as a result, we have seen a real revolution in the scope, ambition, and financial resources dedicated to the United States' Africa policy.

The purpose of today's gathering is to continue to explore and push the bounds of Africa policy. We hope to build upon the White House Conference on Global Literacy, by focusing on education for women and girls in Africa. This is an opportunity for a candid exchange regarding best practices and the establishment of an ongoing dialogue among everyone in this room, private organizations, and the United States Government.

If there is one thing I hope you take away from this visit to New York and the two back-to-back literacy conferences United States Government officials are convening it is this. We see literacy as the key, not only to economic prosperity and advancement, but also for good health.

Since President Bush introduced the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, also known as PEPFAR, in 2003, there has been a significant increase in the amount of money the United States spends to counteract this public health crisis. The program focuses resources on 15 so-called focus countries, 12 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Through September 30, 2005, PEPFAR had supported community outreach activities to over 42 million people to prevent sexual transmission of HIV.

PEPFAR has provided care for nearly 3 million people, including care for over 1.2 million orphans and vulnerable children and care for over 1.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS. The program has also supported counseling and testing to over 9.4 million people and supported training or retraining for over 316,000 people in provision of prevention services.

Over 14 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. These numbers will almost double over the next 10 years. For too many children, education has been a casualty of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

To address this problem, PEPFAR supports programs to assist children to attend school, while also linking with other programs to address difficulties in the educational sector due to HIV/AIDS. PEPFAR also supports prevention education for in-school and out-of-school youth. Working together, we are clearly making strides in the right direction.

### AFRICAN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Another step in that direction is the African Education Initiative that President Bush announced in June 2002. The Initiative is based on the notion that children are the future of the continent and that education is key to increased stability, democracy, and prosperity.

Investing in education is much like planting a seed; it takes time for a child to grow and flourish, but by the time she reaches adulthood, like an oak tree, she is stronger, better rooted, and more capable to deal with any storms she encounters.

Children in sub-Saharan Africa have not always had access to schools. More than one-third of primary-school-age children are not enrolled in school at all, and of those who do enter the first grade, fewer than half will complete primary school.

So we are pleased to note positive trends in places like Ghana, where the enrollment for school-age children has risen from 73 percent in 1998 to more than 86 percent in 2004. The change is remarkable.

But for the continent, it is only a start. In order to spur similar developments elsewhere, the United States has committed \$600 million to provide books, scholarships, school uniforms, and teacher training. As Mrs. Bush announced during a trip to Nigeria in January 2006, the funding is also intended to support training for 920,000 teachers in 20 nations in sub-Saharan Africa.

### GIRLS' EDUCATION

We have also put a special emphasis on increasing access to education for African girls, who account for 55 percent of the approximately 40 million primary school-aged children who are not enrolled in school.

Through the African Education Initiative, the United States is making 550,000 scholarships for primary and secondary education available through the Ambassador's Girls

Scholarship Program. So far, 120,000 scholarships have been provided to students in 40 countries, subsidizing: tuition, fees, books, uniforms, and other essential supplies.

These scholarships are making a difference in the lives of girls, especially those from poor families or rural areas, where their parents might be hesitant – or unable – to send their daughters to school due to financial barriers.

As an educator and an academic by training, I steadfastly believe in the importance of sharing knowledge and igniting intellectual curiosity. It is through learning that all of us expand our horizons, our dreams, and our expectations. By reading books, we are able to travel to other times and places and see life through the eyes of another.

This is true of my own experience. I first encountered Africa in literature. It was through the vivid prose of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka that I fell in love with the continent and pursued a career focused on African politics and policy.

These are enriching experiences, but they are a treasure afforded to those who can read. As a former librarian and teacher, Mrs. Bush has seen that reading opens up new realms and possibilities to children, and she is an ardent advocate of education for all children.

An educated young person is more likely to be healthy, happy, and self-sufficient. Consider that a woman who can read the label of her prescription medication is more likely to use it properly. This is critical especially for those whose lives have been touched by HIV/AIDS.

Educated girls are more likely to know what HIV is and how to avoid it. They learn the attitudes and skills that enable them to resist peer pressure, and they have hope for a better future, which reinforces the importance of taking responsibility for their own lives.

Girls who are educated have more economic and social resources to rely on and therefore can avoid marrying before they are ready and have more of a chance to negotiate their own sexual lives. In fact, educated young women have lower rates of HIV/AIDS, healthier families, and higher rates of education for their own children.

Education also expands a woman's economic opportunities and prepares her for a wider variety of jobs. A woman who understands arithmetic can run her own small business, making change for customers, and earning a sufficient profit to support her children.

And in some cases, education and hard work pave the way for a woman to become head of state, as in the case of Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. President Sirleaf, as all of you know, is Africa's first female elected leader, and I was privileged to be part of the American delegation to her inauguration. President Sirleaf has won the hearts and admiration of the American people, signifying hope for a more peaceful future in Liberia.

## CONCLUSION

We want every African girl to grow up dreaming big and expecting the best out of life. I have no doubt that your nations are currently raising great scientists, artists, and diplomats, and even the next Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Our purpose in convening today's discussion is to focus on that hope. We want to work with your countries to expand educational opportunities for girls. So that tonight, every mother in Africa can sing her baby girl to sleep, smiling and whispering about the wonderful future that awaits her.

With that, I would like to thank all of you for joining us at this special gathering and turn the program over to our Mistress of Ceremonies, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Carol Thompson, who is my resident expert on public diplomacy and education efforts.

