

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

**WASHINGTON**

**REMARKS**

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**1<sup>st</sup> Floor, CONFERENCE ROOM A**

**THE GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS AND THE PEACE CORPS**

Thank you very much for that gracious introduction. It is a pleasure for me to be here today. As you know far better than I, the Peace Corps, through its returned volunteers, has touched every aspect of American life. In fact, my Deputy Director for Domestic Affairs' mother is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer and one of my closest friends is currently serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

First, I will outline what the Bush Administration is doing in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, and then offer you a few thoughts on how the Peace Corps fits into our efforts.

## **BACKGROUND**

All of you are aware of the worldwide pandemic of HIV/AIDS. It was my privilege to lead the U.S. delegation to the U.N. General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS this Summer. This event helped focus the world on a terrible pandemic and its truly global nature. For though the world is correctly focused on Africa at this time, in less than a decade, the global face of HIV/AIDS will probably be that of Southwest and East Asia.

In response to the unique challenges presented by this pandemic, President Bush has initiated an innovative and integrated approach to setting our priorities and implementing our agenda. First and foremost, domestic and international issues will be coordinated and integrated to present a holistic approach to the problem. This approach is mirrored medically in our commitment to an integrated attack on the disease through care, treatment and prevention. The Administration recognizes that the U.S., in order to help its own citizens, must be part of a larger, global solution, and that any successful attack on HIV/AIDS must be accompanied by a general effort of nations to improve the overall health and well being their citizens. While the war on terrorism obviously occupies many of our immediate thoughts, the global fight against HIV/AIDS remains part of the important work of America, and that work continues.

## **THE WHITE HOUSE APPROACH**

In April of 2001, President Bush launched his campaign against HIV/AIDS by naming me the Director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy and expanding our mandate. The mission of the office now includes the international and national security aspects of the pandemic, and coordination of international and domestic policy relating to U.S. efforts to combat the disease abroad. Our Office is the principal entity in the U.S. government responsible for the overall formulation, support and coordination of policy on HIV/AIDS.

In order to better coordinate the Administration's international and domestic fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic,

and to give tangible implementation to our policy decision that international and domestic efforts should be integrated, in May of this year President Bush established a Presidential Taskforce to ensure the most effective response by the United States to the growing threat of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Taskforce is Co-chaired by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, and includes high-level representatives from all major foreign and domestic affairs agencies, including, specifically, the Peace Corps.

The first meeting of the Taskforce was this July at the White House. In addition to the improved coordination it provides, the Taskforce is a physical manifestation of the importance this Administration places on this issue. It represents the forging of new domestic partnerships to work with our international partners on this issue.

Important elements of our fight against HIV/AIDS at home are our own civil society institutions and non-governmental organizations. As part of this effort, President Bush has continued the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, retaining several existing members, as well as adding several new appointees. The Advisory Council serves as one of the principal avenues of advice from and communication with all those elements of U.S. society most interested in and affected by HIV/AIDS. The newly constituted Council will, for the first time, also provide views and ideas on the international aspects of our campaign against HIV/AIDS, and we hope other countries will learn from our experience and establish mechanisms to ensure broad public participation in and support for their own national campaigns to combat HIV/AIDS.

#### **U.S. LEADERSHIP ON THE GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND TUBERCULOSIS**

Internationally, we have moved aggressively to use this new structure to help mobilize the global fight against HIV/AIDS. As I mentioned, in June of 2001, The United Nations held a Special Session of the General Assembly to debate and address the global problem of HIV/AIDS. Under the personal initiative of Secretary-General Kofi Anan, and with strong support from the U.S., the nations of the world have undertaken to establish a new, independent mechanism to raise and coordinate the distribution of massive amounts of new and existing resources to combat the pandemic worldwide. The U.S., at the direction of the Bush

Administration, has been at the forefront of this effort, and has made an initial commitment of \$200 million in the first year of the Fund. This is the largest commitment to the Fund to date. As this article goes to press, we are negotiating with the affected countries (both donors and recipients) and organizations for the establishment of new, innovative, accountable and transparent mechanisms for the disbursement of global assistance to fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis. We are committed to this new Fund using an integrated approach of care, treatment and prevention. While the Fund will focus on direct programs to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, obviously, it must also be concerned about the general health care infrastructure of the affected nations. Our commitment to the success of this Fund is one of the cornerstones of our international strategy.

The United States also continues to lead the world in medical research efforts, not only on HIV/AIDS directly, but on many other emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. As we work against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, we remain mindful of the value of the hundreds of collaborative research efforts around the world sponsored by our Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health. The Bush Administration has proposed and supported increases of several hundred million dollars in the current budgets of these key institutions.

#### **CONTINUING U.S. BILATERAL EFFORTS**

While we are fully committed to the multilateral, global effort to combat HIV/AIDS, we believe that direct, bilateral programs must be enhanced and coordinated on a global basis. The U.S. has consistently been the largest provider of bilateral international assistance in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and is likely to remain so. The U.S. has bilateral cooperative programs with dozens of countries around the world, including 25 in sub-Saharan Africa alone. While our bilateral efforts have focused on the traditional assistance programs of U.S. AID, as many of you know, the Peace Corps has a worldwide commitment to helping the communities it serves with the problems of HIV/AIDS. At this critical juncture in our efforts against the disease, we believe it is essential that all means be utilized and coordinated, and I believe the Peace Corps has unique skills and experience to offer.

One of the first inquiries on international matters to my office was from an American businessman who wanted to let us know what a terrific job Peace Corps Volunteer Don Johnson in

Niger was doing in using innovative HIV/AIDS prevention programs. Mr. Johnson brought together disparate actors to create a market-based system for the more effective distribution of condoms to the most vulnerable communities in his country. It is this kind of public-private partnership between the Peace Corps and businessmen like Chuck York of C&G Manufacturing of Grand Junction, Colorado that has the potential to change and improve the way we fight this disease.

### **THE PEACE CORPS**

As a practical matter, our integrated approach means that an institution such as the Peace Corps can help with the fight against HIV/AIDS in at least three generic ways. The first way, obviously, is through its core purpose of dispatching volunteers around the world to assist local communities in their struggles, not only against poverty, but specifically against HIV/AIDS, which now is so often a root cause of poverty. The Peace Corps has unique experience and people that contribute benefits not obtainable solely through increased spending. We must utilize this special resource in coordination with our other bilateral, international efforts.

Second, each Peace Corps volunteer and employee is part of a worldwide community that is the Peace Corps, and like every institution in the world today, it is directly and personally affected by people living with HIV/AIDS. I encourage you to look for opportunities in your workplace to develop more and better understanding of the disease and its affects, on your colleagues, their families or friends and acquaintances of theirs.

Finally, all current employees and volunteers, as well as returned volunteers and retirees, are part of communities all across America, and in particular here in the greater Washington, D.C. area. As I have said, with HIV/AIDS the global threat is a local threat and the local threat is a global threat. While my remarks have focused on our international plans, do not forget that HIV/AIDS is a real, everyday problem here in our local community. Make an effort to learn more about the clinics and care giving organizations that are working in your community, and support them in some way.

### **CONCLUSION**

At least 40,000 people become newly infected with HIV/AIDS in the United States every year, and while our principal task

must be to bring better care, treatment and prevention to our own country, I am committed to that same goal for those millions afflicted around the world. Here at the White House we will work for the best possible cooperation and coordination not only within our own government, but also with like-minded colleagues around the globe. With its fine traditions of service, its dedicated and talented volunteers and employees around the world, and a commitment to helping that I hope to match, the Peace Corps should play an important role in our renewed efforts against HIV/AIDS.

Thank you for your kind attention.