

## COMMENTARY

# Bush needs to show Africa the AIDS money

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The much-publicized pledge Secretary of State Colin Powell made to the UN AIDS conference that the Bush administration will kick in millions more to fight AIDS in Africa did not quiet AIDS activists. They still bitterly complained that while Africa is being ravished by famine, poverty, war, and worst of all, disease and death from AIDS, Bush is not doing enough about it.

At first glance their complaint seems way off base. Much of the blame for the wars, famine, poverty, and corruption that seem hopelessly endemic in many African countries can be dumped squarely on the backs of the long parade of dictators, despots, and demagogues that rule these countries. They have killed, maimed and terrorized their citizens, rigged

or rejected free elections, have systematically looted their countries' treasuries and live in palatial splendor and squandered millions of their countries meager funds on sophisticated weapons mostly to keep themselves in power.

And then there's the AIDS epidemic that hammers African countries. Nearly 70 percent of the estimated 36 million persons worldwide afflicted with AIDS or the HIV virus are in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, more than 10 percent of the total population has AIDS or HIV. Only a tiny fraction of those with the disease have any hope of getting the potential life sustaining antiretroviral drugs.

Africa's former European colonial bosses did virtually nothing as the crisis mounted to pressure the drug companies to reduce prices on their drugs, or to restructure or

eliminate the colossal debt that staggers African countries, already among the poorest on the planet. This would permit them to purchase drugs, and to bankroll treatment and prevention programs. Even a crisis AIDS conference, a grim report that millions more Africans will die from AIDS in the next few years, and Powell's thinly disguised reprimand of them for their stinginess did not trigger an avalanche of new money from them to fight the disease.

Yet as impressive as U.S. support appears for the AIDS battle, it can and should do more. The economy, despite a mild slowdown is still healthy; the trade deficit has drastically been reduced, and military and domestic spending has dropped. In April, former President Clinton told African leaders at a summit in Nigeria that the U.S. could

contribute a couple billion dollars more to the AIDS fight. But even this would do little more than jump-start the kitty of \$7 to \$10 billion U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan says it will take to make any dent in the AIDS death toll.

However, it's not just the money the U.S. certainly has, or even the guilt trip AIDS activists lay on the U.S. when they say it has a moral and political responsibility to aid Africa. It's about the impact that the disease can have on the U.S. The increase in global travel, and immigration, both legal and illegal, of persons, many of them from countries with a high rate of incidence of the disease, has rendered AIDS stateless and borderless. According to U.N. figures, AIDS/HIV is spreading fast in India, China, the Caribbean, Eastern and Central Europe and parts of

Latin America. The U.S. is hardly immune from the global population flow to its shores.

It's also in the U.S.'s political and economic self-interest to raise the health standards within African countries. The spiraling increase in sickness and death in many African countries would virtually reduce them to near permanent pauperism. This would drain labor resources, the potential for greater trade and commerce, and make Africa's vast mineral resources inaccessible to U.S. industries. The spread of AIDS could also ignite even greater political unrest and violence. This could force the Bush administration to do what it has sworn that it won't do, and that's to maintain a bigger military presence in African countries. This carries the grave risk of involving the U.S. in another costly

and disastrous peacekeeping operation in a country wracked by civil war. And then have to shell out billions to aid its recovery. This would almost certainly bring more accusations the U.S. is an arrogant bully.

Annan put his money where his mouth is when he ponied up \$100,000 from his own pocket for the AIDS fund. This should have publicly embarrassed Western countries, which give nothing but a pittance to fight AIDS. The U.S., thankfully, is not one of them. But if Bush is really sincere when he says the AIDS fight is incredibly important to the United States, he'll show Africans even more money.

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# Surgeon General Satcher right about sex education

By Emory Curtis  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dr. David Satcher, U.S. Surgeon General, just issued a report that urged parents and teachers to level with children about sex and provide them with a comprehensive sex education. His report urged that sex education include the promotion of abstinence as well as safe sex practices and the promotion and distribution of contraceptives in schools.

The report also included an endorsement of cohabitation as a substitute for marriage because, after all, "marriage is not perfect." He also stated that, to date, there is no evidence that sexual orientation can be changed and we should all be tolerant of homosexuals.

As you can imagine, the good brother caught holy hell on all sides for that report. The report was ready for release during the White House's Monica Lewinsky period. For good reasons, it wasn't released then.

As our chief government authority on public health, Dr. Satcher stated this document needed to be released

because of growing public health problems—unwanted pregnancies, anti-gay violence and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

The impact that AIDS is having worldwide and in this country where we, African-Americans, are now 54 percent of those newly infected with HIV, the AIDS precursor.

AIDS is a new disease that just showed up about 20 years ago. But look at what it has done in just those few years.

Relatively, it hasn't struck the United States hard but it has caused 450,000 deaths in those few years. In San Francisco alone there has been 18,600 deaths.

Those numbers look bad but they are dwarfed by the impact AIDS is having in some other countries.

In 1999 alone, Botswana, with an adult (15-49) population less than one half of San Francisco's total population, had 24,000 deaths, Zambia, with an adult population a little more than San Francisco's total population, had a lot more deaths—99,000. South Africa, with 4.1

million adults, lost 250,000 of them to AIDS in 1999.

Those are wipeout numbers. They are the kinds of death numbers due to measles, small pox, and typhus diseases that enabled Columbus and his successor Europeans to take over the Americas.

It is estimated by scholars that the New World's population was about 100 million in 1492 when Columbus landed here. That number was reduced to about 5 million by 1600.

Diseases, not guns are what wiped out so many natives. Just as we would be without AIDS anti-retroviral drugs to slow its progression, the natives had no resistance whatsoever to European diseases new to the land.

When Cortez re-entered Montezuma's stronghold after a two-month hiatus, he found "The street squares, houses and courts were filled with bodies, so that it was almost impossible to pass." During the next 80 years, scores of epidemics devastated the Aztecs and the Incas in Peru.

Sir Francis Drake had that

same good (?) fortune when one of his men brought typhus with them when they landed in St. Augustine, Fla. Drake wrote that the natives "died very fast and said among themselves [that] it was the English God that made them die so fast."

Naturally, with their unseen fatal diseases paving the way through deaths and enfeeblement of the living, the Europeans with their guns and horses, took over two continents. And in the process, some tribes, including the one that greeted Columbus on his first voyage, disappeared from the face of this Earth.

AIDS is depopulating some countries and groups of people now by reducing life expectancy. It is the leading cause of death of the 15 to 49 year old groups in many countries and among many populations. Some countries are having their life spans reduced from the seventies to the forties.

The Caribbean is headed

in that direction now. According to the Caribbean Epidemiology Center's director, C. James Hospedales, the AIDS death rate is doubling every couple of years. He also said two thirds of those infected in the Caribbean die within two years of being infected.

That is what happens with poor people in poor countries. To them, AIDS is death and they have no hope of getting it delayed by antiretroviral treatments way out of their price range. As a result, they are treated as throwaway people.

In the few years it has been around, HIV/AIDS has shown its capability to reduce population and create economic disaster by picking off one of the most important sections of a population - the 15 to 49 year old segment.

AIDS causes economic problems increasing the cost of businesses operations by making the prudent employer

keep extra employees to step in the shoes of the workers lost through AIDS!

Despite the devastation caused by AIDS, those sad facts haven't penetrated the minds of major segments of populations around the world. Even in countries where the infected numbers are growing like weeds, the population is not alarmed enough to make real lifestyle changes. As HIV is mainly contracted by a conscious sexual act, it can be avoided by a conscious act.

Lifestyle changes can change those acts. Religions and social practices keep governments from mounting the down-to-earth campaigns needed to move the population in that direction.

Warns Satcher: "We have created an environment where there's almost a conspiracy of silence when it comes to sexuality. It's talked about in the wrong places in the wrong ways."

The brother is right.

## Fools

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months.

- Committee members would not seek elective office with the branch.
- Committee would request an independent audit of branch finances.
- Committee would appoint an interim executive director and raise funds external to the organization to fund his or her salary.
- The committee will report directly to

the director of national field operations by telephone and written correspondence on a weekly basis.

In the face of this proposed elective corrective surgery to return the patient to full health, Mfume, also known as Dr. Malpractice, chose instead to mandate that an autopsy be performed on a live 70-year-old patient suffering from nothing more than internal bickering.

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