

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 9, 1999

Warm greetings to all of you gathered in Lusaka for the 11th Annual International Conference on AIDS in Africa. This meeting -- and the upcoming international conference on AIDS in Durban -- will provide critical opportunities to unite in the fight against AIDS.

It was a little more than a year ago that I set out on a journey across Africa. For all of us who took that trip, it was an unforgettable and profoundly moving experience. It's hard not to marvel at the pace of change in Africa, or to see in Africa a shared vision of hope and a determination to make the next century better than the last. It is a vision we all share. As Africa's partners in the global community, we are all excited about what it means for our common future.

But the remarkable progress of Africa is threatened by the AIDS pandemic. There are few infectious disease catastrophes in human history that can rival the scope or scale of the AIDS crisis in Africa. Across the continent -- indeed, across the world -- individuals, families, communities, and at times entire nations are staggering under the weight of this plague. And the threat goes far beyond the realm of public health. Entire generations are in jeopardy, including many young people on whom Africa depends for its continued economic progress. Factory workers, engineers, miners, nurses, doctors, teachers, soldiers -- the sustaining force for growing nations -- are being taken in the prime of their lives.

Yet, amid this tragedy, there is hope. In cities and villages across Africa, efforts are being made to stem the rising tide of infections, to prolong the lives of those who are sick, and to stitch together a tapestry of family support systems for the growing millions who are affected by AIDS. From the young people doing street theater in Lusaka to educate their peers about HIV to the support groups in Soweto providing home and community-based care for people living with AIDS, communities are coming together to fight this terrible disease.

My Administration recently announced a new initiative called LIFE: Leadership and Investment in Fighting an Epidemic. This initiative proposes a \$100 million increase in our financial commitment to the global fight against AIDS. If this increase is approved by Congress, it will more than double our support for AIDS awareness and prevention; for home and community-based care; for the care of children orphaned by AIDS; and for development of the infrastructure necessary to assist all three efforts. We invite other G-8 nations to join us in this effort -- and urge other foreign governments, corporate leaders, NGOs, faith communities, AIDS organizations, and citizens across the world to make their own important contributions to the battle against AIDS.

I have also given high priority to the development of a vaccine for AIDS, and our scientists and researchers -- together with their partners in Africa -- will not stop working until we find a vaccine that works for all who need it. Until that day, all of us can play a role: to break the silence and increase the dialogue; to fight stigmatization and protect the rights of those living with HIV and AIDS; to help those infected find the care and treatment they need.

I wish you every success in this conference. The extraordinary group that has gathered in Lusaka represents your faith in Africa's future and will be a meaningful step that this future will meet its great promise. I pledge that the United States will do all we can to be a good partner. Together, I believe we can create an Africa and a world free at last from the shadow of AIDS. For the next generation, we must do no less.

Bill Clinton