

DATA
Bread for the World
“US Catholics Press Conference To Call on Congress To Keep
America’s Promise To Africa”
Tuesday, September 16, 2003

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REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Thank you very much for coming this morning and thank you for your patience. We're gathered in this house of worship just next to the White House to ask President Bush and Congress to keep America's promise to Africa. The President's been very clear. He has over and over said that our nation will do more to help Africans and other poor people around the world deal with hunger, poverty, and disease. He's been very specific that we should launch the New Millennium Challenge Account with \$1.3 billion in 2004. He signed the AIDS legislation that authorizes the AIDS Initiative at \$3 billion in 2004. And he's been very clear that these are new initiatives that should be in addition to what our nation is already doing to help poor people around the world. But Congress and the President are short-changing these new initiatives. The President has the majority in both houses of Congress. The amounts of money at stake are tiny in relation to the U.S. budget, so the President himself clearly has it in his power to keep the promise that - promises that he's made on our behalf to some of the poorest people in the world. The speakers at this morning's press conference include leaders from a very broad range of U.S. churches - Catholics, mainline Protestants, African-American churches, Evangelical Protestants. All of us have rallied support for the AIDS Initiative and the MCA Initiative. Just the members of Bread for the World across the country have sent about 150,000

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letters to Congress about the MCA. Mr. President, we all heard you in the State of the Union message make a very compelling case for the AIDS Initiative, but since then one and a half million people have died of AIDS. Since the State of the Union message three and a half small children - three and a half million small children have died of hunger related causes. And so we're here this morning to urge the President and Congress to keep America's promise to Africa. Our first speaker will be Bishop John Ricard, who is speaking on behalf of the U.S. Catholic conference - U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

BISHOP JOHN RICARD: I'd just like to read a brief statement on behalf of the Bishops of the U.S. I'm a former president of Catholic Relief Services and now I'm head of the Bishops' International Policy Committee. I've been personally to every country - almost every country in Africa some several times. I have seen firsthand the faces of AIDS and grinding poverty. I've also seen how these faces of despair can be transformed into faces of hope by effective AIDS programs. Through Catholic Relief Services and many other programs, the Catholic Church has long served the neediest people in Africa and elsewhere, including one in four people who suffer from AIDS in Africa. No one can have any doubt about the urgency of the need. The United States is the richest nation on earth and it is a scandal that we are the last among industrialized nations in terms of per capita spending on development

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assistance for the poorest countries in the world. Now is the time to fully fund the President's Global Health Initiative and the Millennium Challenge Account. Full funding for effective, morally appropriate health programs and an MCA that is focused on the poorest counties would make a huge difference to millions of people in the world, and especially in Africa. We should be able to come up with these funds now and not at the expense of existing humanitarian and development programs. We would like to credit President Bush for his commitment to address the global health crisis and the scandal of global poverty. We must redeem these promises however, today, without delay. The millions who are dying of AIDS, malaria, contaminated water, and malnutrition cannot wait. Meeting these commitments is not just a question of dollars, but of ethical responsibility and national creditability. Falling short will diminish us as a nation and will allow more deaths and disease and hunger and deprivation among the poorest people on earth. Thank you very much.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Bishop Stephen Bouman is here representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

BISHOP STEPHEN PAUL BOUMAN: I'm honored to serve as the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, where 75,000 members worship God in 25 different languages including Swahili and Lingala. I'm here today representing the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical

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Lutheran Church in America in this message to our President.

President Bush, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has supported your vision of our nation leading a global fight against hunger, poverty, and disease. On behalf of our nation you've made very clear promises to the people of Africa and to other poor countries around the world. We want to join you in making sure that those promises are kept. Mr. President, Lutherans throughout New York City and across America are praying that you will work with Congressional leaders to fully fund the Millennium Challenge Account. We also pray that you will ensure that your HIV/AIDS initiatives achieve its full funding. Our churches and relief agencies are seeing every day what you saw on your trip to Africa. And we know that families struggle to feed their families and entire nations ravaged by AIDS and they can't wait. A personal note here - my son and daughter-in-law and my first grandson live in the Kagera region of Tanzania where they teach in a school that has many AIDS orphans in Bukoba. So for me it's not them, it's us. Mr. President, you were in our city shortly after the September 11th attacks. You've seen with your own eyes what we have seen. You've been to Africa. We've both seen with our own eyes that continent of hurt and hope. In both places you promised to be a leader for healing and justice. We want to help you keep those promises, which lie at the spiritual core of our nation. From ground zero we are asking you to not

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ignore the other ground zeros in our world, and especially that of AIDS in Africa. Fully fund the Millennium Challenge Account, the AIDS Initiatives, and America's ongoing child survival and development assistance programs. The way we'll all heal from this communal tragedy that happened two years ago is through compassion and working for the well-being of every child of God.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Bishop Lawrence Reddik is here. He speaks for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

BISHOP LAWRENCE REDDIK III: For the last four years I served as our church's Bishop for the work in Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia. And I know firsthand of much of the suffering and also of the difference our relief efforts can bring. The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, a historically African-American denomination, includes in its membership persons from a broad spectrum of American societies, economic strata, and sociological classes. Among our members are loyalists to both major political parties in the United States. And in addition to Americans we are linked in mission efforts to the support of our members in the Caribbean and West Africa. Mr. President, members of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church are in support of your vision of our nation leading a global fight against hunger, poverty, and disease. Most church people with whom we relate in other ecumenical groups support this emphasis. We thank you for your recent visit to Africa, during

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which you must have seen firsthand the ravaging of HIV/AIDS and the overwhelming lack of infrastructure which we, as Americans, take for granted. We call upon you, Mr. President, to aid the Africa of the future and the other under-developed areas of the world by leading our nation to do what it can to alleviate hunger, poverty, and disease in the world. Your political leadership can make the funding of the Millennium Challenge Account and the funding of international AIDS accounts possible without cuts to current development and humanitarian assistance. This we believe is essential for giving a chance to those myriads of anxious persons whom you saw on your journey to the African continent. Therefore, Mr. President, I ask and pray that you will work with Congressional leaders to fully fund the Millennium Challenge Account. This will provide needed assistance so that millions of African children can attend school, so that farmers will have support for growing crops and for feeding their families and the families of their nations, and so that persons who are sick can be cured. At a time when you are asking Congress for 85 billion for the aggressive fight on terrorism, I ask you, Mr. President, to find 3 billion for 2004 for the fight against HIV/AIDS, and 1.3 billion in 2004 for the Millennium Challenge Account. People around the world need to know that the richest nation in the world cares about their futures just as we care about our security. And people need to know that we will live up to our

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promises. Please, do not let today's words from these religious and humanitarian organizations fall on deaf ears. Thank you.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Our next speaker is Bruce Wilkinson, who speaks for World Vision.

BRUCE WILKINSON: Good afternoon. I've spent 17 years living and working in Africa and I do speak from an experience base. For over 50 years World Vision has worked with the poorest people around the world in over 100 countries. Caring for orphans and vulnerable children is central to World Vision's mission. HIV and AIDS is destroying 50 years of hard work that we've put in improving the lives of children. It's now decimating that progress that we've made in the lives in children. That's why it's important that we - we have come today to encourage the President and Congress to keep their promise to Africa while maintaining the vital humanitarian programs. Every 14 seconds a child loses his or her parents to HIV and AIDS. That's every 14 seconds. Today there are 14 million AIDS orphans in Africa and these numbers are growing daily - every 14 seconds. That would be like the combined populations of Washington, DC, and New York City resulting with just parentless children running around. It's frightening to imagine the enormous social and economic impact of so many orphans on one continent. The future of Africa is at risk. Children without adequate nutrition, schooling, healthcare,

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can't become productive members of society or help create a strong economic future for Africa. Instead they'll be used as child laborers, they'll become child soldiers, recruited, and they'll also end up being abused sexually. The consequences of not caring will destabilize Africa for the rest of this century. This administration and some in Congress question the ability to fully fund the 3 billion - to use the \$3 billion for AIDS programming in the coming year. I'm here to tell you that that is incorrect. We do have the capacity to use that full funding. Mr. President, programs for AIDS orphans and vulnerable children alone could use that \$3 billion a year. World Vision and ten other humanitarian organizations have a network in Africa right now that would provide necessary services for AIDS orphans and children affected by AIDS. That cause is so crucial to us here today. The Bible tells us in the book of James -- and this is a quote -- what God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this; to care for orphans and widows in their suffering. Mr. President, it is within our power as Americans to provide hope for these orphans and widows. So keep America's promise for the full funding for the Global AIDS crisis, and also to fully fund the Millennium Challenge Account. We must act now because every 14 seconds another child is orphaned in Africa. Thank you.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: I don't think I need to introduce our next speaker, but I would like to say that all of

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us up here thank God for Bono's effective advocacy for Africa.

BONO: The war against terror is bound up in the war against poverty. I didn't say that. Colin Powell said that and he's a military man so we should listen to him when he says things like that. There - these are dangerous times, they are nervous times, and the idea that we can insulate ourselves in the Western world from what's happening in the rest of the world is just plainly ridiculous. The AIDS emergency is just that. It's not a cause. We're not here peddling a cause. We're not here looking to get into America's wallet for another cause. Seven thousand people dying a day is not a cause, it's an emergency. And I'm glad to say that America started the process of getting to grips with what has been a sort of suspicious relationship with the whole concept of foreign assistance. It's very, very important what the rest of the world thinks of us in the U.S. and Europe. It may even be - as well as being a moral imperative to get to grips with these problems, and an economic imperative because they get more expensive the longer we let them go on. It might even be a political and strategic imperative here. Africa in chaos the world does not need right now. But it is. It's a continent set to burst into flames unless we describe this emergency as such and start to deal with it as such, and behave like it's an emergency. We mustn't give in to this idea that it's the lost continent and get used to and numb to its predicament. So

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we're here to try and get President Bush to fully fund the authorization bill that he signed for 3 billion this year. We're here to get him to fully fund Millennium Challenge Account, which is a fantastic idea. I'm not sure everyone explains - it's a way of giving extra funds to countries that tackle corruption and have poverty reduction programs going. It's a new approach to aid and I think the President and his team should be very proud of the Millennium Challenge Account and I think they should work very hard to fully fund it in '04. We know the problems with the economy, security issues, and the war, and American troops. We know that there are lots of programs around the United States that are crying out for funding, but I want you to know that this - there's something, there's some kind of correlation between America's safety and the plight of the poorest and most wretched in this world. I'm not sure what it is, but I know that these men of God who stand behind me, and I'm just your Irish rock star -- I'm the pig in the middle -- will tell you that the plight of the poorest of the poor is what's on God's mind, and I believe that. And I believe that - I believe we've let slide their plight. This is the time to take action and, as I say, to deal with it as an emergency because that is exactly what it is.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Our final speaker is Agnes Nyamayaro. She is here from Uganda where she met with President Bush when he visited Africa earlier this year. She

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knows all too well what it's like to live with HIV/AIDS.

Agnes, thank you.

AGNES NYAMAYARWO: Thank you very much. My name is Agnes Nyamayarwo. I've lived with HIV/AIDS for 15 years. I lost my husband to AIDS and I lost my two sons, one whom I passed the virus to unknowingly, who died at the age of 6-1/2, and the other one who was bullied at school and disappeared from the school and from me. I'm not sure whether he is dead or alive. And that's how I came to be an activist and that's how I said I should go out and talk to people about HIV/AIDS. And last year I came here to talk to Americans about the ages and the problem of AIDS in Africa. And I went back with a lot of hope. And when I heard President Bush had promised the \$15 billion, I - my hope grew even higher. And when he came to Uganda last July I went specifically to thank him for the promise he had made to Africa. And I really told him that we are helplessly waiting for this money. Even the child I was seated with when President Bush came to Uganda died just a few weeks after he had left, because he had lost both parents and he was living with a grandmother and he was malnourished. He could not even get the chance to start on medicines because his body was very weak, and as they were trying to feed her, to boost up the immunity, she got an infection and died. Many, many people have died from last year. People are coming to me asking me about where is the money? Where is the promise,

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which Bush - President Bush promised? We are dying and I'm not even happy that although I know Uganda might be one of the countries included in the funding, but even other African countries need the treatment just the same. We need to keep their parents alive to reduce the number of orphans. Thank you very much.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: I'll be the traffic cop for questions and when you, uh, when you ask a question just say who you are and what your news organization is. Yes.

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: I met with President Bush this morning. We had a good old row. He's very passionate about these problems and I believe him. And when he says he's committed to the long-term on the AIDS question and on the MCA. What I just can't agree with is the numbers. We just can't agree on the numbers. Three billion dollars, to me, says we're serious about the emergency this year. Nothing less. This is what we need. This is what the demand is. Need is great, I believe the capacity is there. He doesn't. He is in charge of America's wallet and as he sees it he wants to spend that wisely. I believe that it's wise to spend now to build the capacity, to build the infrastructure, to take on the emergency that is AIDS. He doesn't. We're having a row. And - but he's in it for the long-term and his State of the Union speech, the spirit of it, is exactly what we need now, which was, you know, we'll

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get the drugs to them on motorcycles or bicycles if we have to. And I just feel that that spirit has been lost a little bit now in the bureaucracy when they're saying, well, we can't really use that money now and, well, you know, it's just - it's - that's a pain in the arse from my point of view.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Questions? Yes?

FEMALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Well, just - let me focus - I mean I think it's just really clear about this - the year - the fiscal year that's - fiscal 2004. That the President asked for \$1.3 billion, that he signed an authorization bill for \$3 billion for fiscal 2004, and on both of those issues both the House and the Senate are moving in a direction that's way short. And our sense is that the administration is cooperating with them, that their position is that two billion is enough for AIDS and that, with a wink and a nod, that 800 million or a billion is plenty for the MCA. So that's what's very clear. On the MCA the President's also promised to increase funding over the next several years. And the urgency then of this year is if you don't keep the promise the first year, the rest is going to be a joke. Is there another question? Yeah? Sure.

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: I already know. I'm positive. I'm depressed.

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: Do I look positive?

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MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: Yeah. That's what - I do believe that, but that's not what we're fighting over. We're fighting over the money now. We want the money now. That's what I'm upset about. I just - as it happens I do think he's in it for the long run. I don't think it's show business, if that's what you're asking.

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: I think there is support in Congress for the 3 billion. I think we've seen various bills come forward, particularly at the Senate, but I think even the House is coming, you know, is coming through on this. I believe they will. There is certainly bipartisan support for this. This is the one thing everybody can agree on, for God's sake. You know, you have - John Kerry's passionate about AIDS, you have President Bush is passionate about AIDS, Howard Dean is interested in this. He sees, you know, the way America is perceived in the rest of the world is a security issue. I mean anyone with a brain is interested in this. But we've got to get cash on the streets now. And as regards my own sort of, you know, how I go about business, you know, I want to pull my hair out. But not at George Bush, not at Tony Blair, not at Jack Sherack, not at Schroeder. At all of them. You know? Because it's never, you know, it's never going to be moving too fast, you know, if you've watched someone die. If you've

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watched the wailing and the keening of their family after somebody dies. You watch children dying needlessly because they didn't get Nevira - their mother's didn't receive Nevirapine. It costs nothing. Then you get very angry. I can get very, very angry. If you want me to do angry I'll do angry. But right now I'm trying to calm down and try and get the President to open his wallet and give us 3 billion. And, you know, and, as I say, I do believe that he's sincere and his team are sincere, they're just not moving quick enough from my point of view.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Yes?

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: Just we've got to sharpen our argument. We've got an unstoppable argument. The absorptive capacity argument, which is that we can only give a certain amount at a certain level over a certain time, it's not actually true. As the people behind me who really understand because their people are on the ground tending to it on a daily basis, 365 days a year. You have to build capacity. That's really important. You have to build the infrastructure if you want to take this seriously. And you've got to spend early on to do that. Now. And so what - tell me your question again. All right, so we're sharpening the argument and - to try and convince the administration that the wise money is to spend - is to spend now and to listen to the people on the ground. Listen to the Catholic Relief

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Services. They treat 4 million people in Africa. Not all negatives, or HIV positives rather. You know, but orphans and the problem as it breaks out. But we have this campaign called Keep America's Promise. And it's, you know, it was Congress authorized a bill for 3 billion this year and we think that was the right figure and we just want to remind people that that's where it's sticking to.

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: Well, yeah, of course I asked him about his trip to Africa. I think he's been changed by his trip to Africa. But changed to the point where he is acceding to our demands for 3 billion, I don't know yet. We'll have to see. We're not going to tire or stop sharpening our argument that it is the wise money. Spend \$3 billion this year.

FEMALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

BONO: Uh -

[Laughter].

BONO: Uh, because I'm an amateur in their professions. And, you know, I have a very professional team with DATA. Our organization is an extraordinary thing. We're trying to treat the poor and most wretched on this earth with a sort of professionalism that they're not used to in terms of their representation. But these people are doing that - have always been doing that. And they're my bodyguards and God's their bodyguards, so I'm - I reckon it's just the smart thing to do.

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REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Any questions? Yes?

MALE VOICE: [Off-mic].

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: Absolutely. All of us are mobilizing a lot of grassroots activity because in the end Senators and members of the House also - they respond very much to what their own people back home have to say. So we're letting people across the country know that this issue - that we're bogged down, that the President and Congress are not on track to keep the promises to Africa. So a lot of people are calling their Senators and representatives. We have a national call in day to the White House, urging people to call the White House directly to urge President Bush to push because he can really make it happen. And in the end, you know, in the end these are politicians that really depends on what Americans say is important to us. So if people back home say to their members of Congress, you know, doing the right thing by Africa's important to me. What's going on? That'll move this in a flash. Is there another question? Yes? What? Agnes, spell your last name and pronounce it again.

AGNES NYAMAYARWO: Nyamayarwo. N-Y-A-M-A-Y-A-R-W-O.

And I should also say that when President Bush came to Uganda, he really said he's committed to fight with us, Africa, against HIV/AIDS and poverty to reduce the number of orphans. So he was very positive and we all - when he left we knew something was going to happen very soon. So I don't know right now what

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happened. Why things are not happening. And people are real waiting and they are dying every day.

BONO: Agnes is going on tour. She's, uh, she's a little support band and pretty good. DATA support. She's going to where? Where? What states? Florida, Tennessee, what else? Kentucky. Just to explain these ideas and to make them physical. And she's a very, very dangerous woman. In a very quiet voice she can dismantle the hardest of hearts. And I've seen her take a whole room -- and I've been in that room -- and she's turned me into a puddle a couple of times. So if you're feeling a bit depressed in your life and you want a lift, this woman is a great joy.

REVEREND DAVID BECKMANN: I'd just like to come back to the question of strategy because I - strategy, because I think one thing that's happened really just now is that some of us have been working on the Millennium Challenge Account issue, some of us have been working more on the AIDS issue. There are groups that care a lot about education in developing countries, or micro [phonetic] enterprise. And frankly there's been some fragmentation of all that. And what President Bush has given us in fact is an overarching vision of what our country should do for Africa and the other poor parts of the world. And the fact that now there's some stumbling going on has really brought all of us together. And I think, you know, certainly the church groups represented here, the other groups

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represented here, are going to be campaigning on these issues for a very long time. And we are not going to let this president or our nation forget that we have made some promises to some of the poorest people in the world and we ought to deliver. Just again that's our message, that America ought to keep its promises to Africa. We want \$3 billion for the AIDS Initiative next year, \$1.3 billion for the Millennium Challenge Account Anti-Poverty Initiative next year, and we don't want that to come out of ongoing programs of assistance to African farmers. We want this to be as the President has promised, additional new, fresh initiatives for Africa. Thank you very much.

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