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Remarks following discussions with President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

George W Bush

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Global Fund To Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis

President Bush. It is my honor to welcome our friend, the President of Nigeria, to the Rose Garden. Mr. President, welcome to Washington, the Rose Garden. And of course, Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Secretary-General, thank you for coming.

As well, we are joined by two members of my Cabinet: Secretary of State Powell, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson. I want to thank them both for being here. Scott Evertz, who is the Director of the National AIDS Policy Office is with us. Scott, thank you for being here. And of course, Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Adviser.

I am looking forward to meeting with the President on a range of issues that are important to our nations. This morning, we've spoken about another matter that involves countless lives. Together, we've been discussing a strategy to halt the spread of AIDS and other infectious diseases across the African continent and across the world.

The devastation across the globe left by AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, the sheer number of those infected and dying is almost beyond comprehension. Suffering on the African continent has been especially great. AIDS alone has left at least 11 million orphans in sub-Sahara Africa. In several African countries, as many as half of today's 15year-olds could die of AIDS. In a part of the world where so many have suffered from war and want and famine, these latest tribulations are the cruelest of fates.

We have the power to help. The United States is committed to working with other nations to reduce suffering and to spare lives, and working together is the key. Only through sustained and focused international cooperation can we address problems so grave and suffering so great.

My guests today have been doing their part and more, and I thank them for their leadership. President Obasanjo last month led the nations of Africa in drafting the Abuja declaration which lays out crucial guidelines for the international effort we all envision. Secretary-General Annan, too, has made this issue an urgent priority. He has been an eloquent voice in rallying the resources and conviction needed in this cause. When he visited the White House

in March, we talked about the AIDS pandemic. We agreed on the goal of creating a global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. The G-8 has been discussing the potential fund.

Our high-level task force chaired by Secretaries Powell and Thompson has developed a proposal that we have shared with U.N. officials, developing nations, and our G-8 partners. We will need ideas from all sources. We must all show leadership and all share responsibility.

For our part, I am today committing the United States of America to support a new worldwide fund with a founding contribution of $200 million. This is in addition to the billions we spend on research and to the $760 million we're spending this year to help the international effort to fight AIDS. This $200 million will go exclusively to a global fund, with more to follow as we learn where our support can be most effective.

Based on this morning's meetings I believe a consensus is forming on the basic elements that must shape the global fund and its use. First, we agree on the need for partnerships across borders and among both the public and private sectors. We must call upon the compassion, energy, and generosity of people everywhere. This means that not only governments can help but also private corporations, foundations, faith-based groups, and nongovernmental organizations, as well.

Second, we agree on an integrated approach that emphasizes prevention and training of medical personnel as well as treatment and care. Prevention is indispensable to any strategy of controlling a pandemic such as we now face.

Third, we must concentrate our efforts on programs that work, proven best practices. Whenever the global fund supports any health program, we must know that it meets certain essential criteria. We must know that the money is well spent, victims are well cared for, and local populations are well served.

That leads to the fourth criterion, namely that all proposals must be reviewed for effectiveness by medical and public health experts. Addressing a plague of this magnitude requires scientific accountability to ensure results.

And finally, we understand the importance of innovation in creating lifesaving medicines that combat diseases. That's why we believe the fund must respect intellectual property rights, as an incentive for vital research and development.

This morning we have made a good beginning. I expect the upcoming U.N. Special Session and this summer's G-8 summit in Italy to turn these ideas into reality. This is one of those moments that reminds us all in public service why we're here. It challenges us to act wisely and act together and to act quickly. Across the world at this moment, there are people in true desperation, and we must help.

It is now my honor to bring to the podium, the President of Nigeria. Mr. President.

President Obasanjo. Mr. President, Secretary-General of the U.N. I am particularly grateful to you, President Bush, for making this ceremony to coincide with my visit to you here at the White House in Washington, DC, on your very kind invitation.

When African leaders gathered in Abuja, 2 weeks ago, to indicate their unflinching commitment to fight the scourge of HIV/ AIDS and related diseases, the joint message of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health was brought to us as a message of hope from the United States of America. Today, Mr. President, you have begun to concreteize that hope for Africa and particularly for millions of Africans infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We are still far from the $7 billion to $8 billion annually that experts reckon will be needed to make impression on the ravaging effects of this dreadful scourge. But with this beginning, and just the beginning as you have kindly emphasized, for the U.S., all nations, governments, foundations, private individuals, and private sector and, indeed, all human kind who are stakeholders in the health of humanity are challenged and called upon to make contributions to the global trust fund for HIV/AIDS and related diseases.

Mr. President, I thank you, on behalf of all AIDS sufferers in the world, but particularly on behalf of all AIDS sufferers in Africa, for launching the global fight against HIV/ AIDS pandemic.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you very much. Mr. SecretaryGeneral.

Secretary-General Annan. President Bush, President Obasanjo. I wish to thank you, President Bush, for committing yourself today to placing the United States at the forefront of the global fight against HIV/AIDS. It is a visionary decision that reflects your Nation's natural leadership in the United Nations, as well as your recognition of the threat posed by this global catastrophe.

To defeat this epidemic that haunts humanity and to give hope to the millions infected with the virus, we need a response that matches the challenge. We should now build on the remarkable progress over the last year in galvanizing global awareness of the threat of HIV/AIDS.

I believe we can all agree on five key objectives for our response: First, to ensure that people everywhere, particularly young people, know what to do to avoid infection; second, to stop perhaps the most tragic form of HIV transmission, from mother to child; third, to provide treatment for all those infected; fourth, to redouble the search for vaccine as well as cure; and fifth, to care for all those whose lives have been devastated by AIDS, particularly the orphans, and there are an estimated 13 million of them worldwide today, and

their numbers are growing.

As we declare global war on AIDS, we will need a war chest to fight it. We need to mobilize an additional $7 million to $10 million a year to fight this disease worldwide. The global AIDS and health fund that I have called for as part of this total effort would be open to the nations, as you heard from the two Presidents, from governments, civil society, private sector, foundations, and individuals--all hands on deck. And the resources provided must be over and above what is being spent today on the disease and on development assistance to poor countries.

This founding contribution by the U.S. with the promise to do more will encourage or energize others to act. Africa, of course, is the continent that is most profoundly affected by the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the continent most in need of hope for a better future.

The peoples and the leaders of the continent are rising to the challenge, as President Obasanjo showed most recently by hosting the Abuja AIDS Summit. However, we must not forget that other parts of the world, from the Caribbean to Asia to eastern Europe, are also confronting the spread of this virus and need urgent assistance.

Mr. President, it is my hope that your commitment today will set an example for other leaders. When we meet at the General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS on the 25th of June in New York City, there will be a strong support for the global AIDS and health fund. As that happens, I believe today will be remembered as the day we began to turn the tide.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. It has been my honor to host this very important announcement. It's also my honor to recognize two Members of the United States Congress who are going to work with this administration to make sure that our commitment becomes reality: Senator Frist and Senator Leahy. We're so thrilled you're here. We appreciate your vision, and we appreciate your leadership.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.