

# WHERE THE END OF POVERTY BEGINS

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22 February 2003

Fellow graduates of Princeton, ladies and gentlemen, good morning! Dean Russel, thank you for those kind words. To be given the opportunity throughout my career to work for causes in which I truly believe – and to see the difference that it has made in people's lives – has been its own reward. To be honored by Princeton for that work and to be here in your company is a great bonus.

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Over the years, I have met thousands of people in extreme poverty. Each one has a story of endurance, determination and remarkable resourcefulness. I think of a bright-eyed young girl I met in Afghanistan in June 2001. Her name is Katra. Despite Taliban prohibitions against the education of girls, she had the courage to attend a home school supported by CARE. Katra was determined to become a doctor and she wants to contribute to the future of her country.

I also think of Herath Banda, a hardworking farmer I met in Sri Lanka. With CARE's help, he had increased the productivity of his small farm, so that he could sell a portion of his harvest in the market. To complete his family's one-room house, he had been acquiring bricks for six years. With pride and glee, Herath informed me that he would finish the house in just one more year.

If Katra and Herath are able to nurture hope for a better future, surely I can, as well, and so can we all.

Difficult though it may be to fully grasp, half of humanity is eking out a living on two dollars or less a day. Of this population, 40 percent, or 1.2 billion human beings, try somehow to survive on one dollar or less a day<sup>1</sup> – about as much as we would pay for one cup of coffee.

Because the poorest people have such scant resources, the choices that confront them in their daily lives are very basic: whether to purchase food for the whole family or medicine for a sick child; whether to send a child to school or keep her at home to care for a parent with HIV/AIDS.

Just last week, I received an email from CARE staff in Iraq, telling me about a teacher whose salary is barely enough to support his family and to make the payments on his second-hand pair of trousers. He is paying for the trousers by installment.

People in extreme poverty live in a world severely circumscribed. They reside in the flimsiest shelters on the most precarious sites; they are hit hardest by natural disasters; and they are most exposed to infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. They are balanced every day on a razor's edge of crisis.

In the U.S., we face our own kind of crisis. We are uncertain about the security of our American homeland; we are engaged in a war against terrorism around the world; and we are transfixed by the prospect of war in Iraq. In these circumstances, I know that a challenge to work collectively as global citizens to end poverty may encounter great skepticism.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that the world already has the knowledge, technology and wealth to end poverty. If we had the collective will, we could find the way. There is nothing more important that we could do to make the world better – for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002*, and World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/2001*.

Today, I want to talk with you about why it is important to end extreme poverty, how it can be done, and where, in fact, the end of poverty begins.

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Why is it so important for us to fight global poverty?

There are three arguments to consider. The first is that reductions in poverty will benefit not only the less developed countries but also the industrialized countries.

For example, the economic and social development of poor countries will reduce global population growth, restrain illegal immigration, and control the spread of infectious diseases. Advances in transportation, communication and globalization are rapidly shrinking the world. In a world that is becoming ever smaller, it is in the interest of the United States to spread the benefits of prosperity.

The second argument for combating global poverty has surfaced in the aftermath of September 11. It suggests that terrorism somehow grows out of extreme poverty. Nothing in CARE's experience, working with thousands of the world's poorest communities, indicates that poor people are predisposed to become terrorists. The people behind the hijackings and killings of September 11 were neither poor nor uneducated. The most that can be said is that fanaticism often preys on a sense of social injustice, hopelessness and desperation. Poverty is not itself the cause of terrorism; yet to the extent that people around the world enjoy greater social justice and inclusion, America as a nation will be more secure.

The third argument – and the most compelling reason for combating global poverty – is a moral one. It is based on the dignity inherent in each human being and on the oneness of all humanity. Poverty is, first and foremost, an assault upon the dignity of a person, and each of us bears a responsibility to affirm and protect the dignity of others. That so many people are so poor in such a prosperous world is an assault on the dignity of us all!

As I travel the world, I am struck by the closeness I feel to the people whom I meet. That closeness can be heartbreaking. It was for me last September when I visited villages in Malawi in the middle of a massive drought and talked with mothers who were cradling their malnourished infants. And in November, when I visited southern Sudan. People talked with me about the men who had been killed by the civil war, the women and children raped and kidnapped, and the livestock stolen. They had lost their loved ones, their livelihoods and their very culture.

But that is only part of the story. Almost always, when I visit places of distress, I am also inspired – and even energized. I see examples of incredible determination to keep body and soul together and to persevere in the most adverse circumstances. During that same trip to Malawi, I saw men who were taking proactive steps to prevent a food crisis. With help from CARE, they had learned how to tap into underground springs, build small dams, and irrigate their land. Women were cultivating the land and turning it into gardens of lush vegetables. Together, they were turning a brown, parched landscape into a green oasis. And in southern Sudan, the men and women who had lost their loved ones and their livelihoods to the war were starting all over again. They were training their few remaining oxen to pull a plow. In the process, traditional pastoralists were turning themselves into effective farmers. If I were in their place, I wonder whether I could muster the same courage and resilience.

During my decades of public service, I have been privileged to feel intensely close to people in distant places, and to know that we share the same conviction about the power of human interconnection. I remember a woman I met in a remote village of Honduras right after Hurricane Mitch. The local matriarch, wrapped in a shawl, threw her arms around me and said, "Only God and CARE come to visit here." People in her village appreciated our material assistance, but they also valued our companionship – our solidarity.

Why is it important for us to fight global poverty? At the end of the day, it is because of that sense of interconnection, combined with our sense of the dignity inherent in every human being. Or, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it: "In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor

impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother."

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Drawing strength from our human interconnection, how do we end global poverty and build a better world for all?

I will focus my response on Africa simply because it is so often regarded as the hardest development case. If you follow the news through television, you can hardly be blamed if you see Africa in a state of mayhem. In fact, 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are poorer now than they were in 1990.<sup>2</sup> What is disappointing is that our media rarely put these problems into context or explain how underlying causes interact. How, for example, drought, HIV/AIDS and poverty have reinforced one another to produce the food crisis in Southern Africa – that region's version of what my UNICEF colleague Carol Bellamy calls the "perfect storm."

The list of causes is long and their interactions complex. Yet understanding these underlying causes and how they inter-relate is critical to fighting global poverty. Let me touch on some of the most pervasive challenges facing Africans today.

First, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Of the 42 million people in the world with HIV/AIDS, nearly 30 million live in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> HIV/AIDS is not only a health problem. It wreaks havoc on national productivity. It ostracizes the people infected and excludes them from critical social networks. It robs entire communities of the most productive members of society, including teachers, health workers and farmers.

On a visit to Lesotho in southern Africa, I met a national soccer star who is working for CARE – training teenagers to educate their peers on how to prevent the spread of AIDS. What had motivated him was the realization that the soccer leagues throughout Lesotho had been disbanded. Why? Because so many teenagers were going to two, three or more funerals on Saturdays that the coaches could no longer field complete teams. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is the most devastating humanitarian crisis of our time – and possibly of all times. Stopping it is a precondition for development in Africa.

A second underlying cause of poverty is lack of access to basic education. One-hundred-twenty million children in the world – a majority of them girls – never enter a classroom or learn to read or write.<sup>4</sup> Yet, research has shown that no social investment brings greater returns than basic education, especially for girls. Each year of schooling for girls is associated with increases in family income; decreases in fertility rates; and decreases in infant, child and maternal death rates. Not to mention increases in knowledge and self-confidence.

A third underlying cause: lack of access to clean water. More than a billion people in the world, 495 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, do not have access to clean water.<sup>5</sup> In the poorest communities, diarrhea is the biggest killer of children. Clean water, when accompanied by sanitation and hygiene, reduces disease and saves lives.

There are other root causes of poverty. At the top of my list are poor governance, discrimination, civil conflict and harmful trade policies that block entry of goods from developing countries to markets in industrialized countries.

Development organizations like CARE are committed to doing more than treating the symptoms of poverty. We seek not only to identify root causes but also to learn how they reinforce one another and

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002*.

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update*, December 2002.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2003*, and World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*. UNICEF, SOWC 1999.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

to devise ways to attack them individually and collectively. We recognize the need to focus not only on top-down, but on bottom-up approaches; not only on growth but on equity; and not only on physical infrastructure but on human resources, civil society and governance. Drawing on our global experience, we support local aspirations and capacities, so that poor communities can create their own lasting solutions. The beginning of wisdom is understanding that the exact combination of causes and solutions must be specific to each setting. This is an ambitious agenda, but we have, overall, learned a great deal about how to be effective in reducing poverty.

That learning has translated into real progress. Each time I visit an African village where CARE is working and see the resourcefulness, ingenuity and determination of the people, I see how development assistance can be effective. People are getting at root causes of poverty. Development assistance can support the basic values and motivations of poor people, and make their fight to build better lives more effective.

In Tanzania, women are gaining access to opportunities and choices they did not have before. Last year, I visited a CARE project called Hujakwama, which in Swahili means “you are not stuck”. The name conveys to women that they have the power to improve their own lives. The project focuses not only on improving women’s access to water, but also to sanitation, health care, education and income-generating opportunities. All told, the project has trained more than 1,200 women in entrepreneurial skills.

And in Burundi, CARE is helping Hutus and Tutsis – ethnic groups with a long history of conflict – labor side-by-side to rebuild houses destroyed by war. When I visited Burundi last year, I met an elderly man named Andre. Eight of his children had been killed in the ethnic conflict. Five children, including an orphan he was caring for, were living in the remnant of his tiny house. Andre proudly showed me the foundation that had just been laid for his future home. “I am too old to work,” he said, “so the younger, stronger people are helping me.” Working together, members of the community – both Hutus and Tutsis – completed Andre’s house in just two weeks.

Development assistance can be effective. With local leadership and commitment and outside support, advances are occurring in communities across Africa. Each case is important in itself. It also contributes to a larger transformation. Though change may be slow and grudging, we need to remind ourselves that the results are worth the effort. Despite the enormous toll that poverty continues to take around the world, we have seen progress on vital fronts.

National leadership and grassroots support in Uganda have cut the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in half since the early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Dramatic increases have been achieved in agricultural productivity. India, for example, is now self-sufficient in grains. Between 1980 and 1990, immunization rates increased from five to 80 percent,<sup>7</sup> and helped save the lives of 4 million children each year.<sup>8</sup> Eight-hundred million more people have obtained access to safe water since 1990<sup>9</sup>, and illiteracy among adults has been cut almost in half over the last three decades.<sup>10</sup>

You see, it can be done! For many millions of people, the world has gotten better. Still, there is much more work ahead of us, and we must continue until we overcome extreme poverty.

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If ever there were a challenge that cries out for American leadership, it is the fight against global poverty. In visiting Senator Bill Frist’s website, I noticed a quote from Elton John, with whom the Senator is allied in the fight against AIDS. “To look after our own at home is a sign of strength. To reach out to others around the world is a sign of greatness.” Just imagine the impact of an America that put ending poverty at the top of its strategic agenda!

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<sup>6</sup> UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update Report – June 2000*.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, *Progress of Nations 1998*.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, Millennium Development Goals Web site, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002*.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

Imagine the impact of a U.S. president who pursued the fight against global poverty with the same vigor that President Bush has led the campaign against the regime in Iraq!

When it comes to reducing global poverty, the United States could make a powerful contribution on many fronts. Let me cite two of these fronts briefly, and then discuss a third.

First, let's look to trade. Opening the markets of the largest economy in the world could give a critical boost to the export growth and economic development of poor countries. In the year 2000, Congress virtually eliminated tariffs on textiles coming into the U.S. from some African countries. This has been a positive advancement. On the other hand, President Bush also signed a Farm Bill last year that will award subsidies of tens of billions of dollars to American farmers over the next decade.

The new law makes American sugar and cotton cheaper than African sugar and cotton, effectively keeping them out of our market. A political strategy to phase out U.S. agricultural subsidies would provide big opportunities for African economies.

Second, let's look to diplomacy. Violent conflicts are underway in some 35 countries around the world.<sup>11</sup> Most of these conflicts are internal; almost all are in developing countries. And in every case, the conflicts take their heaviest toll on poor people. Where the United States is prepared to give sustained diplomatic attention, it can often contribute to resolving these conflicts. For example, the Bush administration has quietly but effectively supported talks aimed at ending the civil war in Sudan – a war that has gotten little coverage in the U.S. media, but that has killed two million Sudanese and displaced four million. If successful, the peace process could make a huge difference in Africa's largest country. Diplomacy is an under-appreciated resource in fighting poverty.

A third front in fighting poverty is U.S. development assistance. That assistance is vital in helping the poorest countries to build the capacity to be more self-reliant and to engage in the world economy. Roughly 80 percent of Americans strongly support cooperation with the poorest countries.

Americans view hunger as a world problem of the first order, and think the U.S. should do more overseas to address poverty. Americans typically believe that 20 percent of all government spending goes to foreign aid.<sup>12</sup> They are astonished to learn that the actual amount of U.S. spending on foreign aid is less than one percent!

Americans express concern that the U.S. is carrying more than its fair share of the burden of assistance. But, even though we contribute the most in absolute numbers of dollars<sup>13</sup>, the U.S. is actually dead last among the 22 industrialized democracies in percentage of GNP spent on international development. There is so much more that we could do!

In his first two years in office, President Bush's international agenda was dominated by the so-called "harder" issues of military security and economic policy. He struck a different note last March at a UN conference on development. He reaffirmed "the commitment of the United States to bring hope and opportunity to the world's poorest people." "We fight against poverty," he said, "because faith requires it and conscience demands it. And we fight against poverty with a growing conviction that major progress is within our reach."

Specifically, President Bush proposed the creation of a new Millennium Challenge Account. By 2006, \$5 billion will have been added to the core U.S. budget for development assistance – a 50 percent increase. All \$5 billion would be channeled to developing countries that meet certain thresholds in terms of economic freedom, political liberty and the rule of law. I have some concerns about this initiative, including a worry that it could be subverted by narrow geopolitical objectives, especially during a time of

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<sup>11</sup> Project Ploughshares, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Conrad Grebel College, *Armed Conflicts Report 2001*.

<sup>12</sup> Bostrom, Meg, *Public Attitudes Toward Foreign Affairs: AN Overview of the Current State of Public Opinion, October 1999*.

<sup>13</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, [www.terrorismanswers.com/policy/foreignaid.html](http://www.terrorismanswers.com/policy/foreignaid.html)

war. But we do not want to lose sight of the bigger picture: the Millennium Challenge Account, if enacted by Congress, would mark the most significant expansion of development assistance since the 1960s.

In his State of the Union message, President Bush came forward with another bold initiative. To join the global battle against AIDS, especially in Africa, he proposed a \$15 billion program, \$10 billion of it in new money, over five years. I am heartened by the President's proposal for two reasons: first, because it marks the true beginning of a U.S. response to the AIDS pandemic that is in keeping with the scale of the problem. Second, because it has received support from such a broad-based, politically-diverse constituency. We can all take pride in the role of Senator Frist in building that constituency and in making the case to the President.

In 1970, the U.S. and other leading industrialized democracies agreed on a common goal of allocating point 7 percent of their gross national product to international development. If approved by Congress, these two presidential initiatives – the Millennium Challenge Account and the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief – would be important steps in the right direction. It would still be a very long stretch to meet the goal of point 7 percent of GNP. But increasing the U.S. contribution by even one-tenth of a percent of GNP would be a start. To get all the way there will take truly visionary leadership by a succession of presidents. It will also take a tremendous surge of activist support from the American people.

How much of the global fight against poverty can the U.S. take on? I cannot wait for this debate to get underway.

It is impressive that countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have met their goal of point 7 percent of GNP. I recognize that the U.S. has other responsibilities in the world, but I also believe strongly that we must achieve a better balance between defending ourselves from our enemies and providing hope and opportunity to others. Our contribution to the fight against global poverty would be a true measure of this country's greatness.

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So where does the end of poverty begin?

It begins with an idea – an act of imagination and the embracing of a vision. At a global level, the end of poverty begins with the idea that a world without poverty is both morally necessary and actually achievable. At the level of families in poor communities, the end of poverty may simply begin with the conviction that their lives – or their children's lives – can be made better.

The end of poverty must begin with the governments of developing countries. They bear a special responsibility. Effective governments create policy environments that respect human rights, encourage meaningful political participation, promote development, and foster civic pride and entrepreneurial spirit. These governments give priority to education, health and other services, which are essential investments in people in extreme poverty.

It begins with leadership. I am impressed by the recent display of leadership by the newly elected president of Kenya. One of President Kibaki's first acts in office was to abolish fees for public schools, and parents flooded the schools with their children.

Of course, good intentions can only go so far. To actually reduce extreme poverty, it is also important to set goals, lay out strategies, mobilize resources, assign accountability and measure progress.

The end of poverty also begins with poor communities, local leaders and grassroots organizations. They must be the owners and organizers of their own destinies. People in communities that work together can overcome conflict, share the costs of bringing clean water to everyone, rebuild schools torn down by war, raise children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, and press governmental authorities to be accountable.

The end of poverty begins with Katra in Afghanistan and Herath in Sri Lanka.

The end of poverty also begins with each of us. Given the interconnectedness of the world and the oneness of all humanity, we can and must play a role.

There is a very real sense in which each of us –in this hall and around the world – must be part of where the end of poverty begins. The moral arguments to end poverty have long been there. But today, for the first time, we have the knowledge, technology, and wealth to get the job done. We could actually put an end to extreme poverty in a matter of decades.

Our enlistment in this cause starts from the realization that we are citizens not only of our own country but also of the world. We have an obligation to be knowledgeable about the world and about the engagement of the U.S. within it. We should develop views on trade policies, agricultural subsidies, and whether it makes sense for the U.S. to have a defense budget equal to those of the next 22 largest defense budgets in the world combined.<sup>14</sup>

We should also educate ourselves on the humanitarian consequences of war.

The end of poverty begins with the leaders in this audience seeing how the institutions in our lives – where we work, where we study, where we worship – can help in the fight against global poverty.

It begins with each of us casting a ballot for political leaders with a broad view of the world. It begins with each of us sending a fax or making a phone call to our representatives in Congress in support of President Bush's Millennium Challenge Account. It begins with standing up in our corporations and urging that social responsibility applies not only in our home community but in the world community. It begins with volunteering at a nonprofit organization to help poor people in our home community. Or, it may begin by making a donation or serving on the board of an international relief and development organization. Be forewarned, however, that is how I began at CARE, and look at me now! Once you get into this kind of work, it is hard to know when to stop!

It may be tempting to conclude that the task of ending poverty is too overwhelming and too long-term. In the end, it must be done one individual, one family, one community, one country, one region at a time. But we have learned a lot about how to scale up our efforts, partner with others and increase our collective impact.

Last year, CARE made a direct difference in the lives of 31 million people. Compared with the 1.2 billion people in extreme poverty, 31 million may seem like drops in a vast ocean. But, each one of those drops is a human being who seeks dignity and security – the same dignity and security that we seek, and find, every day in this country.

Herath, the farmer I met in Sri Lanka, believed that, with persistence and resourcefulness, he would acquire enough bricks to build a home safe and secure enough for his family. So I believe that we, in partnership with many thousands of others, can muster the will and the resources to build a better world for our global family. It begins by our taking that first step, acquiring that first brick – and the next – until a stable foundation is laid. With ingenuity and commitment, we can and we will build a world where extreme poverty has been overcome – where everyone sleeps in safety and awakens with hope.

Where does the end of poverty begin?

It begins with each of us. It begins here. And it begins now.

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<sup>14</sup> The Center for Defense Information, 3 February 2003.