



## **HIV/AIDS in Africa: What Works?**

**Center for Global Development and John Snow, Inc.**

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Transcript of Remarks by

**Congressman Jim McDermott**

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**Ms. Birdsall's Introduction:** Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for real and I have the great honor and pleasure of introducing to you Congressman Jim McDermott. He was elected in 1988 to the 101<sup>st</sup> Congress; he's currently serving his eighth term as Representative of Washington State's 7<sup>th</sup> District. What you don't know from his bio, unless you know him well, is that he has spent time in Africa in Zaire in the late '80s. He is a physician and, most important, he's always been interested in healthcare issues and he is the Founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Task Force on International HIV/AIDS.

He introduced the AIDS Housing Opportunity Act in the Congress sometime ago in Washington State, he was a proponent and developed legislation for low-cost health insurance to the unemployed and working poor. He's saying it's enough but I want to emphasize that he is an advocate, a passionate advocate, and a politician and how much luckier can we be than to have both of those for our host lunchtime speaker, Congressman McDermott.

### **Congressman McDermott:**

Colin Powell said in November that the biggest problem in the world right now is not terrorism. It's the AIDS epidemic. And I think that got lost in all the noise that's going on in this country but it is a profound understanding that the Secretary of State has about the importance of this epidemic.

I started out in '86 in the state legislature putting money in for AIDS education and some of the issues you have here today of a program that works has been going on for a long time. As was pointed out, I was Regional Medical Officer for the State Department. I had the country south of the equator so I had everything from Somalia to the Republic of South Africa. I traveled 80,000 miles in seven months and saw the epidemic as it was in full bloom in Africa at that point. When I came to the congress, nobody had any idea of what was going on in the world.

It was amazing as I talked to people and they just didn't have any concept of where this epidemic was. So I told the Speaker that I would like to try and educate these people about what is going to be an enormous problem down the road. He gave me a blank check to go and look at the world. I traveled to about 26 countries looking at what was happening to the epidemic and seeing

what USAID was doing, and trying to get a feel for what the national policy was towards AIDS. I came away appalled.

We did a study under the GAO back at about '93, which showed that 53 cents out of every dollar that we put out for AIDS, never left Washington, D.C. And I spent a good bit of time trying to change that and I still think that is a big problem. And I will tell you what I think an effective program really has to be.

When I started in Africa in 1961, I was an Operation Crossroads volunteer and I lived in a little village in Ghana where I worked and ate and lived with the people and built a schoolhouse. Any program that's going to work, internationally, with AIDS has got to be indigenously developed. It is not going to come from the top, it's not going to come from all the right people in this room, from universities and all the rest; it has to be drawn from the people. If it doesn't work that way, it simply isn't going to work.

And I got a whole long list of anecdotes I can tell you, a couple of them probably are enough. They told me that the social marketing of condoms was working Zaire and that in this particular year had delivered nine million condoms to Zaire. Now there are nine million men in the child-bearing years or the sexually active years, so if you figure that out, that's one per person. If that's a success, I have some questions about declaring that a success.

Of course, it's better than nothing, at least for one day, right? I'm sure you've all heard this story and it's not really impossible of demonstrating how to put a condom on. Well, you use a broom handle, of course, because you're not going to do it really, so you use a broom handle. Africans ideas work nice and concrete so they went home and got a broom handle, put one on, put it in the corner, and then went ahead with business; you have to understand where people are coming from.

I went down to Capetown after a State Department physician told me that genocide was occurring in South Africa.

Because of sanctions, we would not do anything for the government that the government could do for itself, and so we weren't doing any AIDS education and they weren't doing any. So at that point, the prevalence in Capetown was .2 percent and that's 1989 when I came to the congress; it's now 21 percent.

Now when I was there on that visit in 1989, I went to the Primary Health Network. This is a group that was doing health work in the Cape town area and they had local workers who were going out and talking to people and bringing them in and trying to deal with healthcare issues and we had a little roundtable discussion about why don't people use condoms. The women offered a number of reasons in their own words why the people there did not use condoms. The message to me was that if you're going to talk about AIDS, you're going to have to talk the way people talk and in the languages they speak. You must deal with the individuals that the people are going to for information, that they trust.. You can have all the television, you can have all the billboards, you can have all the leaflets, and you can have all this stuff, and it doesn't make any difference.

Three years ago, I visited with the president of Nigeria, the president of Angola, and the president of Botswana. Indeed, I give them high marks for coming out and publicly talking about this and trying to do stuff that Uganda has done. But I said the next step has got to be for you to call a meeting of all the chiefs, get all of the chiefs in here, and educate them, I said I saw it happen in a village in Ghana and I know how it works. If the chief puts his whisk up, that's it and that's what we're going to do.

And I said there are two things that you've got to talk about. One is you've got to talk about older men involving themselves with young women and the other thing is you've got to talk about condoms to debunk the myths. Those kinds of myths have got to be dealt with right up front; if you

don't, we can put a lot of money out. And I think that it's hard for us to get out of our Western mindset when we go into a situation like Africa or India.

We're headed for the same thing in India, it's much worse actually. Within a few years, there will be more cases in India than there are in Africa, all of Africa. So it's just over the horizon a little bit that it's coming and we don't know about China but it sure looks like the same things are happening. Some of the southern provinces like Hunan Province have all already got enormous problems. So this problem isn't going to go away and we can spend money but if we're going to spend money on it, we got to spend it in ways that really make sense that involves the people in the country in developing it.

Now I'll just tell you on little story about that because I think that the president has this idea about a Millennium Fund. And a Millennium Fund is something that goes to countries that have good governance. They don't have any corruption and they are going toward democracy and all of this kind of stuff. Would you tell me which country in Africa that would go to? Which one of them would you spend any money in if you were going to look for a perfect governance situation? This is designed not to put in any money out, in my view.

And the fact is when I was India and I talked to the USAID people one day, they said they had \$20 million that they wanted to give to an NGO program in Madras down in the south. They said that they were afraid to give it to them because the Indian government wants to run it through their health department where they'll skim off stuff at the national level and then it'll go down to the state and they'll skim off and about five cents out of the dollar will ever get out to the program.

I was talking with Finance Minister of India about Boeing airplanes and the other things that I was there to talk about. But I said as I was leaving, I got one little thing here and it's kind of below your pay grade, but I sure would appreciate if you might think about and I explained this. How we wanted to give the \$20 million but we weren't going to give it to the government because we knew it would never get to the people and he said I understand; and the next time I came the money had gone, the \$20 million.

Now you can't have every dollar that goes into a country and have a congressman go over and personally shepherd it all the way out to the NGO, that's not possible. So the people, who drew up this Millennium Fund idea, maybe they've never been to Africa or maybe they've never been out of the country, I don't know.

I have trouble figuring out how they can come up with this kind of stuff with a straight face because it's simply, in my view, is not reasonable. There are certainly areas that we have begun to work in the area of mother-to-child transmission. We have a wonderful possibility of protecting youngsters in that period. You've got other problems after the birth and you've got the whole question of how do you feed the child and not give them mother's milk and all of these questions are there. But we do have a way of protecting and you might say this is kind of low-hanging fruit.

There are all kinds of other problems. But I think we ought to be pushy on the mother-to-infant transmission program everywhere. As far as I'm concerned, that ought to be the lead element because we'll do a triage, folks, we're not going to say everybody. So the question is how many can we save, how can we be most effective in saving people in this whole process?

The other thing, of course, is this whole business of money. The congress approved \$200 million for the program for Mother-to-Child and that was a retreat from the \$500 million that Senator Helms offered. I almost fell out of my chair when I read that he upped and said that we should spend \$500 million on it. The turn around in his conversion was too fast for me but the fact is he said \$500 million and the congress would only come up with \$200. And then you get to all of this other business about the millennium challenge and how much we're going to put into the Global Fund and the whole thing is going to cost about \$10 billion in the Global Fund. That's what they estimate and the United States portion of that is probably \$1.2 billion.

Well, if we're lucky, we'll get \$300 million out of congress. Now anybody who says they care and won't vote for more than \$300 million is just simply blowing smoke. They don't care because we're going to spend, in a war in Iraq very shortly, \$100 to \$200 billion over the next 10 years and we haven't got a \$1.2 billion for the World Global Fund.

I'm one of those people that believe that the old Bible versus about how your deeds ye shall know them. When you put your money up there, you mean it; if you don't put it up there, you're just talking. I told the speaker that this is not an issue of health. I'm a doctor and all of that but that's not the reason I'm concerned about it. This is a global development question because the ties back in 1989 or so did a study on what the economic impacts would be to their development of the AIDS epidemic. They estimated by the year 2000, they would have lost \$10 billion in productivity over the 10 years, from '89 to '99, from the AIDS epidemic.

When you look at these African countries and you realize what is happening to their healthcare system that's imploding under the weight of this and you have the problems. I had lunch with Kenneth Kalunda (phonetic) in 1991 and he said to me as we were leaving the table, Jim, I don't know what we're going to do when we have 500,000 orphans in Lusaka, well they've got them, and the number of orphans is increasing.

And if you begin to think about the social problems created by children raising children or nobody raising them, it's a Lord of the Flies kind of thing we're talking about here. We are looking at a whole continent that's going through that and for us to sit back and say it doesn't have any impact on us, that is simply denial.

And I think that what this conference is trying to do in trying to make people aware of the fact that it's much more than an issue of healthcare and of AIDS, it really it a whole question peace and development in the world. This is an emphasis that has to be made to this Administration. They don't want turmoil, they don't like terrorists but if you let countries like Nigeria and others, which are half-Muslim go down the tube, you're asking for troubles. And that's why I think that this is such an important thing and why I'm so glad you asked me to come here. Thank you.