



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Make Poverty History

Closing Remarks of Ambassador Bleich at the Make Poverty History Road Tour, ANU

(As prepared for delivery – May 14, 2010)

Thank you Tom for that kind introduction, and thanks to all of you for your interest in eliminating poverty and making the world a better place. One of the things I learned about speeches back at the White House is never try to speak after Barack Obama. I'd add to that list Tim Costello.

I want to congratulate you all. My wife and kids and our three teenagers have been traveling Australia for the past five months. We've been going to some of the places that you'd expect diplomats to do -- like Lady Gaga concerts-- but we are also going to schools and universities where we've had the chance to meet many young people. We are also meeting a lot of young Australians on line. I joined Facebook a few years ago for the reason that most people my age join Facebook, which is so that I can still communicate with my kids. But it is not just my kids. When I was first announced as the nominee for U.S. Ambassador my system nearly shutdown from all of the Facebook friend requests that I got from here in Australia. A lot of people asking me to barrack for Collingwood. But also a lot of young people who wanted to engage directly on real issues. I'm struck by how many young people all over are making a difference in their schools and communities and around the world. Facebook and Skype and all of these new technologies are great connectors to one another – even after you leave here today. And they are also great levelers that allow us to reach people in power in ways we could never have imagined only 10 years ago.

The past two days are only a step in the journey you've all started to end world poverty. I won't repeat the statistics you've heard. And I won't bore you with a list of the many things that the United States has done to reduce those statistics, and the many challenges we have. I want to talk instead about you. Throughout history many people looked at these same types of statistics and they gave up. They said that poverty was a sad fact of life. That it can never be changed. That it is impossible. In fact, that is the history of the world to date; that we have accepted poverty the same way that we accept the seasons, or the weather.

But if history teaches us anything, it is that we have been wrong about what is impossible time and time again. All great social change seems impossible. Until it happens. And then, it was inevitable. People thought eliminating small pox was



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impossible. They thought integrating South Africa was impossible. They thought democracy was impossible. They thought putting a person on the moon was impossible.

I heard this a lot back in the United States. When Barack Obama first announced that he was running for President, it was dismissed as impossible. We were told that America was not ready for a black President, that Americans would never elect a man with a foreign name like Barack Hussein Obama, that no outsider could ever raise enough money to drown out the entrenched interests, and yet the answer to all of these fears and threats was just three simple words. Yes. We. Can. What his election demonstrated was that we Americans were actually better than we thought we were, than we'd been told we were. Millions of people, who were sick of racism, and fear-mongering, and special interests, had the courage to be the change they wanted to see in the world. They defied the experts. They defied their own fears. And they fought for a principle: that America stood for place where people would not be defined by what their parents did, or the color of their skin, but instead we would be judged by the content of our character. We would judge our leaders that way.

The fight against global poverty is no different. There are those who say that poverty is impossible, ignore this great arc of human history, an arc that bends slowly and painfully, but inevitably toward justice. It comes down to nothing more than the questions we ask and the choices we make. Will we ignore the difficulties of those who are less fortunate, or will we be honest and know that there but for the grace of God go I? If I had been born in sub-saharan Africa. If my father and mother had been poor. If I had been born severely mentally disabled? If I'd been born a few generations earlier. If a natural disaster had struck my community. I would be poor. I would be struggling to protect my family against hunger, disease, and violence.

Every day, I remind myself of these facts. Each of us has the same responsibility – whether as an Ambassador or as student -- to challenge our government, our civic groups, or Facebook networks, and ourselves to do more. This year the United States put more than \$63 billion towards combating health threats that can destroy families' ability to work. And we did it because of people like you, people who would not settle for less. We don't fear this call for action, we want it. The President just signed into law legislation that more than triples the size of our youth community volunteer program, AmeriCorps. Because what the world needs most is young people working around the globe to improve food security and pressing our partners hard to do more. Like Australia, we have to keep working to build local economies, develop safer cleaner energy and drinking water, to educate communities, and ensure that women and minorities and are not left out of the benefits. All of these are part of the global effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We can give the next generation the same



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chances that we have had. All it takes is a belief in ourselves, in the courage to stand up against skeptics and say “yes we can.”

The fact that you are here now speaks volumes about you as people and about Australia as a nation. The only thing you need to have is what is already in your hands. It is what Margaret Mead said: Never doubt the ability of a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has. Make poverty history? Yes. We. Can!