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NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton: African Leaders Must Meet the Aspirations of the Young

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The aspirations of Africa's youth for greater freedoms and economic opportunities cannot be ignored, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said, urging African leaders to get in front of the desire for change and meet the needs of the continent's burgeoning youth population.

The secretary spoke to diplomats at the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, June 13. She said African leaders need to "rise to this historic occasion," inspired by the "Arab Spring" revolution in the Middle East and North Africa, and create "a future that your young people will believe in, defend and help build."

More than 40 percent of Africans are under 15, and nearly two-thirds of the continent's population is under 30, Clinton said.

"These young people are all coming of age at once, and they are all connected," she said. "There are no more secrets because of social media."

The young are speaking "with an eloquence and an advocacy that should ... make us proud." Africa's youth want to succeed and build their future and simply need the chance to be able to do so, she said.

"Their message is clear to us all: The status quo is broken. The old ways of governing are no longer acceptable. It is time for leaders to lead with accountability, treat their people with dignity, respect their rights and deliver economic opportunity. And if they will not, then it is time for them to go," Clinton said.

Clinton said leaders who continue to hold on to power at all costs, suppress dissent and use their power to enrich themselves and their supporters "are on the wrong side of history, and time will prove that."

The December 2010 suicide of a young Tunisian fruit seller that sparked his country's revolution came because "no matter how hard he tried, a corrupt regime would not give him the chance to have the sweat of his brow translated into economic benefits for himself and his family," Clinton said.

Many young people undertake years of study and hard work, and their efforts should bring them opportunities for a better life, she said.

She welcomed the AU's plans to bring young Africans

into its discussions on youth empowerment and sustainable development, and said many countries have shown remarkable economic success in recent years, with sub-Saharan Africa boasting six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies in the last decade.

However, the secretary warned, a prosperous future is not a guarantee, and she urged greater economic diversity on the continent.

"Several of Africa's highest-performing economies are dependent on a single industry or a single export, often a commodity," she said. That can discourage new industries and the jobs they would create, and "concentrate a nation's wealth among a privileged few."

She welcomed signs that the push for political and economic reform that has inspired the Arab Spring "has already taken root in many African nations," with many countries making commitments to democracy and human rights, investments in education and health programs, and other efforts to meet the needs of their young people.

"The United States believes deeply in these values," and in the "promise and potential of pluralistic democracies" and in free markets, Clinton said, and it stands ready to support governments that undertake reforms.

The reforms are a necessity, or else "your hardest working, your best and your brightest will either be frustrated and act out against the leaders of their country or they will leave to find opportunities in other lands," she said.

"I have never met an immigrant from Africa who has not said he or she wished they could have done the very same in their own country, among their own people, close to their family," Clinton said, expressing her hope that instead of leaving Africa, people will start returning "because this is where opportunity for the future resides."

U.S., Other Donors Make Big Investments in a Healthy Future

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — Some of the world's richest nations and organizations pledged June 13 to make significant investments in the health of the world's poorest children.

Donor nations and organizations committed \$4.3 billion to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), which will enable the consortium to reach more than 250 million of the world's poorest children with serums to protect them from life-threatening diseases. GAVI estimates that these funds and the efforts of the alliance partners will prevent more than 4 million premature deaths from disease by 2015.

The United States, represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is one of GAVI's donor nations, and pledged \$450 million to the mission at the London meeting. USAID administrator Rajiv Shah called it "one of the best, most cost-effective life-saving investments we have ever made."

GAVI's structure allies donor governments, global foundations and international health organizations with developing-world governments to deliver the health benefits of vaccines to poor children.

Shah said this structure has a multiplier effect that supports the distribution of vaccines to areas where it has been difficult in the past. "At a time when budgets around the world are being scrutinized, this partnership with donor and host-country governments, civil society and private-sector partners ensures our development dollars have the greatest impact," he said. "Not only is our commitment inspiring the generosity of other donors, it helps ensure the quantities of vaccine needed to obtain lower prices, allowing us to save even more lives."

The GAVI-backed programs will provide children in poor countries with protections from pneumococcal disease, rotavirus, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), hepatitis B, meningitis A and yellow fever. Since the launch of the program in 2000, GAVI estimates that 5 million premature deaths have been averted by its immunization efforts.

But GAVI doesn't simply distribute vaccine to countries where it is needed. GAVI requires that recipient countries apply for the privilege of participation and provide co-financing for an immunization program, which, GAVI estimates, will reach \$100 million by 2015. The alliance, headquartered in Geneva, reports that 50 nations sought to participate in its most recent application round.

"Today is an important moment in our collective commitment to protecting children in developing countries from disease," said Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was among the participants at the London conference. "But every 20 seconds, a child still dies of a vaccine-preventable disease. There's more work to be done."

The global pharmaceutical industry is also making contributions to enable greater immunization coverage in the developing world. A week before the June 13 meeting, giant manufacturers GlaxoSmithKline and Merck announced decisions to reduce some vaccine prices charged to the alliance by as much as 60 percent. India-based firms Serum Institute and Panacea Biotec also offered discounts.

"These are promising offers that demonstrate industry commitment to work towards affordable and sustainable

prices for life-saving vaccines in developing countries," said Helen Evans, GAVI's interim chief executive officer.

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