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Dinner Speech at GBC Awards
Kennedy Center, Washington DC

June 11, 2003

President Museveni of the Republic of Uganda,
Secretary Powell,
Minister Schily (the German Federal Minister of the Interior),
Distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

As Chairman of the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, I have indeed great pleasure welcoming you to the second of our annual dinner awards. The presence of so many people tonight demonstrates most encouraging support for our organization.

And I would also like to say how much we appreciate the continuity and style for to this evening's proceedings by the incomparable Glenn Close. She has an extremely difficult job establishing the tone for an event whose purpose is one of deadly earnest. But also an event we hope you will find inspiring.

For it is about humanity. And how to deal with the greatest threat to humanity. It's about HIV and AIDS. About a virus and a disease that probably cause more misery and suffering than any other on this planet. A disease that kills people in their millions, and damages indiscriminately the sensitive economies that support them. As we said, 3 million people - that's more than the metropolitan area of Washington D.C. - died of AIDS last year.

But these figures alone cannot capture the true horror of the situation:

- AIDS kills fathers, mothers and children.
- AIDS kills brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances.
- AIDS-infected babies are sentenced to death while they are still in the womb.

No one can win the war against this terrible scourge on their own:

- No government - regardless of how committed its policy may be.
- No institution - regardless of how much support it may grant.
- No business - regardless of how dedicated it is tackling this challenge.

Fighting AIDS is a cause I adopted a long time ago.

So when, last year, DaimlerChrysler received the GBC's Business Award for Excellence in the workplace honoring our program in South Africa, I was extremely proud indeed. On the same occasion, I accepted with profound humility an invitation from my friend Ambassador Holbrooke to become GBC Chairman.

I took on the challenge because this was a perfect opportunity. A perfect opportunity to show the power for good that exists in the fast-beating heart of big business. And its dedication to the principle of social responsibility.

Over the past year, many new companies - as you've heard - have joined us. Many have brought with them pioneering workplace programs and community activities. And together, we have certainly increased international advocacy of this important cause. And in this regard I would like to pay particular tribute to GBC President and CEO Dick Holbrooke, and his entire team. Their tireless and highly effective efforts have transformed this organization into a force that enjoys today phenomenal goodwill.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

tonight I begin my second year as Chairman of the GBC.

As I ponder the task ahead, I know that further productive growth of our organization is vital if we are succeed in crushing the AIDS enemy. And we target to double the number of corporate members in my second term.

Growth - and partnership with governments, NGO's and other institutions - is the only way we can respond effectively to the challenges ahead.

We, as businesspeople, need to endorse the powerful initiatives taken in the fight against HIV/AIDS by great statesmen like George W. Bush. And indeed, it was my privilege in April to join a small group of leaders at the White House for serious discussion with the President about his outstanding initiative.

And I can tell you it had a tremendous effect in this world where the United States again have shown leadership on a most important issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Money is important to the global campaign against HIV/AIDS. However, we all have much more to offer. At April's White House meeting, I pledged the GBC's full support for

the building of serious public/private partnerships. And tonight is an ideal opportunity for us to demonstrate that we are ready to deploy our skills in the AIDS war.

It's time for us to stand up for what we believe. We must act quickly - with total commitment and total conviction. Only then will we be of real assistance in turning the AIDS tide. A tide that threatens large tracts of the globe. And hundreds of millions of its inhabitants.

We must shut the flood gates that let in HIV/AIDS. We cannot fail. If we do, the human race will face unprecedented loss and agony.

But,

- when I look at the strengths of my colleagues on the GBC,
- when I look around the Kennedy Center tonight,
- and when I think of the others committed to this life-and-death struggle,

my confidence grows.

I know that many of you have made a strong personal commitment. And your help continues to be vital.

- Use your professional or political status, or your elevated position in society.
- Use your influence.
- Use your popularity.
- Take advantage of the fact that people listen when you speak.

I think, then we will prevail!

God bless you, and thank you for your continued support!