

President Bush Pledges \$200 Million in Aid for Africa

Protesters at White House Chant, 'Billions for Star Wars, Chump Change for AIDS'

By Sonya Ross
Associated Press Writer

With the Nigerian president and the United Nations secretary-general at his side, President George W. Bush on Friday pledged \$200 million - and promised more money later - for fighting AIDS and other diseases ravaging Africa.

The U.S. pledge is seed money for a \$7 billion to \$10 billion fund that U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan hopes the world's richest nations and private philanthropists will establish to fight AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Annan also is trying to drum up support for an international action plan to be adopted at a June 25-27 special session of the U.N. General Assembly.

"Across the world at this moment there are people in true desperation and we must help," Bush said during a Rose Garden ceremony.

Activists sniffed at Bush's promise for future funding and called the \$200 million a pittance. A hodgepodge of protesters milled in front of the White House gate, chanting, "Billions for Star Wars, chump change for AIDS," a reference to the missile defense system Bush has said he wants.

"In the face of what will soon be the worst plague in human history, it's tragic that the richest country in human history is unwilling to contribute its fair share to finance the solution," said Salih Booker, executive director of the nonprofit advocacy group Africa Action.

Even Annan and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo gently prodded for more.

"As we declare global war on AIDS, we will need a war chest to fight it," Annan said. "We need a response that matches the challenge."

Obasanjo estimated that \$7 billion to \$8 billion will be needed each year "to make an impression" on the epidemic. "But, with this beginning, and just the beginning, ... I thank you on behalf of all AIDS sufferers in the world, but particularly on behalf of all AIDS sufferers in Africa," he told Bush.

Harvard University economist Jeffrey Sachs said the size of the initial donation was not as important as the fact that it represents a new approach to fighting AIDS.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the \$200 million is not sufficient. And there is no doubt in my mind that there will be more money to come," Sachs said, adding that the global fund will "raise the magnitude of the battle in a very important way."

Bush said the funds were "a founding contribution" outside of \$760 million the United States was spending this year on international AIDS efforts, and billions devoted to AIDS research. He said the United States would give more "as we learn where our support can be most effective." Bush noted that 11 million African children have lost their parents to AIDS.

"In a part of the world where so many have suffered from war and want and famine, these latest tribulations are the cruelest of fates," Bush said. "Only through sustained and focused international cooperation can we address problems so grave, and suffering so great."

Thompson says AIDS fight worldwide is biggest thing Bush administration will tackle.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson says fighting AIDS worldwide is likely the biggest thing the president's administration will be taking on.



"Because it's so mammoth, the consequences are so great," Thompson told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in Washington. "The ability to accomplish a good end is not all that promising, but it's the right fight. It has to be done."

Thompson will spend the week in Geneva at the annual gathering of the World Health Organization.

While the headline issue at the gathering is mental health, Thompson said, "AIDS is going to dominate."

Last week, President Bush announced that the United States would make an initial payment of \$200 million into a global AIDS fund, devoted to treatment, prevention, research and other assistance.

"It's something that Americans have got to step up and do something about," said Thompson, who co-chairs a White House task force on AIDS with Secretary of State Colin Powell. "AIDS is becoming the number one foreign policy issue now that (Powell)

is dealing with."

The secretary of state warned lawmakers last week that "nations will collapse" without intervention.

Thompson said the U.S. is "going to have to lead" in the international fight against AIDS, which affects an estimated 36 million people worldwide. About 70 percent are in sub-Saharan Africa, where the disease has left an estimated 11 million orphans.

Powell leaves for Africa May 22, and Thompson plans a trip later this year.

But the U.S. role in the AIDS fight is sharply debated. The \$200 million AIDS contribution announced by Bush was quickly termed paltry by critics.

There are differences over how to best spend the money, how to operate the fund and over the balance between treatment and prevention. In its defense of drug patents, the U.S. and American drug-makers have clashed with countries demanding access to cheaper treatments.

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