



MILLENNIUM
CHALLENGE CORPORATION
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Transcript

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Millennium Challenge Corporation Hosts a Public Outreach Meeting

Speakers

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Andrew Young,
Co-Chairman,
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Former Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz.
Senior Fellow,
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James Kunder,
Acting Deputy Administrator,
U.S. Agency for International Development

James Musoni,
Minister of Finance,
Republic of Rwanda

Stuart Symington,
United States Ambassador to Djibouti

Michael Arietti,
United States Ambassador to Rwanda

James Kimonyo,
Rwanda Ambassador to the United States

Transcript

BENT: Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, all protocol having been observed -- since there are so many luminaries here, I'm sure I'd forget a few, and so I won't attempt to try and list everybody -- it's a great honor to join you to celebrate the \$24.7 million threshold program between Rwanda and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. I'm going to say just a few words about the program, and then I'll turn the podium over to our panel, to our distinguished speakers.

The MCC program marks an important chapter in Rwanda's story of development. We're proud to be here.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation provides assistance from the American people to countries that practice good governance, fight corruption, make investments in health and education, and promote economic freedom. We're pleased to partner with Rwanda through this threshold program.

While Rwanda has demonstrated impressive economic growth, this threshold program, in fact, is going to focus on something rather different. This program will give the opportunity -- give the country an opportunity to pursue greater democratic reform aimed at improving the rule of law as well as political and civil rights. The threshold program complements and supplements Rwanda's own goals, its own overall reform efforts, its own road to progress.

There will be three distinct components of our threshold program: first, strengthening the judicial sector, which will entail investing in training and targeted technical assistance for the judiciary and implementing a legislative reform agenda; second -- and this is the bulk of the program -- strengthening civil participation, which will build the capacity of civil society organizations and support citizen development in the budget process and in development planning; third, strengthening civil liberties -- civil rights and liberties, which involves building the professional capacity of journalists, publishers, and media owners.

These are the areas that the Rwandans themselves have identified as what they need to do, and so, therefore, we're proud to be part of the effort to -- to support it.

With the help of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has been our primary partner in the threshold program -- and they'll oversee the implementation of this particular program -- we expect that Rwanda will see results that are critical for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth. The Millennium Challenge Corporation is proud to work with Rwanda toward this goal for the benefit of the Rwandans themselves and for generations to come.

Let me now introduce our first distinguished speaker, Ambassador Andrew Young. Ambassador Young is chairman of the board of the Leon H. Sullivan Foundation and co-founding partner of Goodworks International, a consulting firm dedicated to promoting sustainable development in Africa and the Caribbean. He has had a distinguished career as a civil rights leader, an American statesman, humanitarian, and businessman.

During the civil rights movement, Andrew Young together with Martin Luther King led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He later served -- and this is where I remember him from -- as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and mayor of Atlanta.

Ambassador Young, we're delighted you could join us today, and let me turn the podium over to you.

(APPLAUSE)

YOUNG: Rwanda is one of the miracles of our time, and I was blessed to become a part of that miracle when I hired a secretary to speak French, and it turned out that she was from Rwanda. When she got married, we had to go to her wedding, and all of the bad things I thought and felt and never talked with her about about Rwanda, all of a sudden, were all washed away. I could not imagine a country having come so far in healing in just 10 years.

And so we began working with Rwanda, trying to tell the Rwanda story, that already Rwanda had achieved a level of forgiveness and reconciliation that I think is unknown anywhere in the world, including South Africa, and with Bishop Tutu saying that there's no future without forgiveness. I think that President Kagame said that there's no future without forgiveness or fairness -- and fairness.

And it was the only place I'd ever heard of where they had an election and nobody won. Everybody automatically received 50 percent of the votes -- I mean, of the appointments, and the only requirement was that a minimum of 30 percent of the appointees or elected officials had to be women. And so we ended up with a country with 48 percent run by women in Africa and with people, who actually 10 years before had been seeing their families fighting and killing each other, sitting down, working together, stringing baskets, and laughing and joking like nothing had ever gone wrong.

This was the kind of place that needed our help. But they were already on the way. They were already committed to fairness. They were already committed to a certain level of transparency. And I saw that the Millennium Challenge opportunity was sort of like a mini Marshall Plan for Africa, and we look at the Marshall Plan as one big clump of investment in Europe, but it actually was a series of evolving partnerships, and what we've got in Rwanda is evolving partnerships between the public and private sector, between the United States and the other nations of Africa. But we watched them, as I say, turn the red tape of bureaucracy into a red carpet inviting investment, inviting tourism, and making people welcome in participation in their growth and development.

It's one of the places that I have the most hope for anywhere in the world. In fact, in some ways, I think they are ahead of us.

Now that's just the basis of a half a dozen trips to Rwanda and wandering around on my own, but I wish that our cities were as safe as Kigali, and I wish that there was the kind of spirit of forgiveness in our neighborhoods that you see even in the Gacaca courts where people are being tried and then forgiven.

And so this miracle is certainly one that fits the criteria of the Millennium Challenge, and the Millennium Challenge is one of the best things that the United States has done, and I have to give President Bush a lot of credit for bringing this public-private partnership, a combination of government emphasis and free-market approaches, and with a basic commitment to education -- I shouldn't say this, but I will. Why does rich Botswana charge for elementary education and Rwanda gives education free up through 10th grade? They have their values right, and they are on the way to a great future, and we ought to be a -- proud to be partners in that.

And I thank the developers of the Millennium Challenge and this administration and the Congress and the private sector and the non-profit agencies because everybody has discovered Rwanda, and it's going to take everybody's help to overcome the tremendous difficulties that they've had in the past, but nobody's doing any more than the people of Rwanda.

(APPLAUSE)

BENT: Our next speaker is Jim Kolbe. Jim serves currently as the senior transatlantic fellow for the German Marshall Fund of the United States. However, importantly for me, he is also really the legislative founder, the legislative father, of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. He, in his distinguished career, spent 22 years in the House of Representatives. He was elected 11 consecutive times. He was, at the end, chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations where I had the distinct honor and sometimes pleasure of working for him.

(LAUGHTER)

Jim is, frankly, terrific. He is one of the most thoughtful, articulate, careful, reasoned, wide-ranging, fair-minded man I've ever met in my life.

So, with that as an introduction, Jim.

(APPLAUSE)

KOLBE: Well, thank you, Rodney. My father would have liked those things you said. My mother probably would have believed them.

(LAUGHTER)

It is a great pleasure to be here, Ambassador Young, Minister Musoni, other distinguished guests on the dais and in the audience here. This is a great opportunity and a great -- a great day, as Ambassador Young has clearly indicated, a great day for the Millennium Challenge Corporation and most especially for Rwanda.

My -- my purpose of being here is to lend some context to this event and, as we launch the Rwandan threshold program, just saying a few words about the MCC, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and its -- and its origins.

The vision -- and rightly so -- as Ambassador Young has said, that the vision that President Bush articulated the Monterey Conference is one of providing assistance to countries that have a proven record, not a record of development because we're talking about countries that are poor and countries that are in need of development. We're talking about countries that have proven a record that they will use the development assistance dollars that are provided to them -- they'll use it wisely for the benefit of their people.

It's a -- it's about governance, and as we know, that's an essential element of success in any kind of development program: the transparency of the actions of government and of contracting and procurement, the respect for property rights and the respect for the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary system, the strength of the legislative system, and perhaps most important of all, the willingness of the government to fight and tackle corruption, which we know can be a debilitating influence in so many countries.

Now these criteria, 16 of them in all, are not certainly perfect, but we do at least use objective measurements for them, and that is something that really distinguishes the Millennium Challenge Corporation, I think, from anything else in the world that has been started to do this kind of development assistance, and so I believe the Millennium Challenge Corporation not only has been successful, is being successful, but will continue to succeed, and, indeed, Oxfam of America last week just did a report or released a report which -- I think the title of it says it all, "Measuring the Right Results: The Strength of the Millennium Challenge Corporation." That's really what it's all about.

But one of the things we found as we went along the way was some countries just weren't right there ready to be given a compact, and it required some -- another step to get them there, and that's the origin of the threshold program, the realization that there are countries on the cusp, on the edge of being eligible, but not quite there, and rather than just leave them struggling on their own to try to get there or trying to find their way, the threshold program is designed as a hand by the Millennium Challenge Corporation to get them to the starting line, not to the finish line, but to get them to the starting line so they can get in the race with a compact.

So it's an early step. It's only one step, but it's a very important step in many countries. And today we sign this agreement for the 19th threshold agreement. Two of those have gone on so far to full compacts, and there are eight more that are now eligible as compact countries. So the threshold program also is really working. It's a stepping stone to the success of this program.

So I'm delighted to be here today because I think this is an important -- important -- day and a very exciting way -- exciting day. There are, as Ambassador Young suggested, few countries that are more -- that are more deserving of this kind of assistance than Rwanda, a country that's gone through so much, but has come so far and has done so much for its people.

I look forward only to the day when we can come back for the signing of a full compact, so I wish the greatest of success to Rwanda, and thank you all very much for being here.

(APPLAUSE)

BENT: Our next speaker is Jim Kunder. I've known Jim for years. He is one of the most able professionals that you will ever meet in the development field. He is currently serving as the acting deputy administrator for USAID and concurrently serves as the assistant administrator for Asia and the Near East. He is such a capable guy. I know he can wear two hats at the same time.

His previous positions at USAID include director for relief and reconstruction for Afghanistan, deputy assistant administrator for external affairs, and director of the agency's Office of the U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Program. Jim has also worked for Save the Children, the U.S. House of Representatives, and, if I remember correctly, he served as a platoon leader in the U.S. Marine Corps.

So, without further ado, Jim.

(APPLAUSE)

KUNDER: I was caught up in the celebratory mood of the day and all the enthusiasm for this wonderful undertaking in Rwanda, and then, unfortunately, Rodney said he only remembered Ambassador Young when he became a U.S. official which reminded me I'm old enough to remember him when he was with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I remember Jim Kolbe when he was in elementary school. So...

(LAUGHTER)

But it really is -- it's wonderful to be up here with such a distinguished group of leaders who have played an important role in our -- in our country.

I want to thank Minister Musoni and -- and the team from the Rwandan government, including Ambassador Kimyono, Ambassador Young, Congressman Kolbe. I also want to point out that U.S. Ambassador Arietti, the previous U.S. ambassador to Rwanda, is here, who had a great role in launching many of these initiatives, and our current U.S. Ambassador Stuart Symington is joining us as well. So we have an extraordinary, distinguished group of people.

And I do want to note as well that -- the work that Rodney and team have done under Ambassador John Danilovich's leadership. He's really doing some enormously creative things at the Millennium Challenge Corporation that I think have really advanced significantly the development agenda not just in Africa, but around the developing world.

Several speakers have commented on -- on the difficulties that Rwanda faced within the last decade, and the plan for this Millennium Challenge threshold program really grew out of the -- I think it's fair to say -- startling progress that's taken place in Rwanda under President Kagame's leadership, and I'm glad that Ambassador -- that Congressman Kolbe gave you a quick primer on how the Millennium Challenge threshold program works.

But, for those of you who don't know the program, it's really worth going to the Millennium Challenge Corporation Web site and understanding the complex system that they use to determine when we will put Millennium Challenge Corporation funding into a country.

In -- in Rwanda's case, there are just a couple of these quantitative indicators that we use to measure countries around the world, those in political rights and civil liberties and what we call voice, and how (inaudible) indicators that need some additional plussing up in Rwanda. They have the strong support of the government, but don't quite meet the Millennium Challenge Corporation's indicators, and it is those programs in which USAID will be working, along, I might say, with the United States Department of Justice, with our Rwandan colleagues under this threshold program to, we hope, get Rwanda up to the point where it will be eligible for a full Millennium Challenge Corporation compact grant.

The government of Rwanda, and President Kagame in particular, has developed a compelling vision for its future to transform the country of Rwanda into a knowledge-based economy by 2020, and the government of Rwanda has initiated a number of critical reforms to take the country along that visionary path. This Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold program is fully consistent with the government of Rwanda's priorities and that vision for 2020.

And while we -- we throw out these phrases like, "Well, this will strengthen civil society, and this will strengthen the judiciary," when you peel away the rhetoric, this is exactly the kind of concrete changes that will ensure that Rwanda's vision for itself is realized. This question of strengthening civil society -- if there is one critical factor to sustaining democracy and good governance, it is creating effective demand on the part of the populace so that women's groups and lawyers' groups and farmers' groups have voice and can hold the government accountable for the goals it's established for itself and that judiciary that will ensure that rights are sustained along that path of human progress.

In closing, I might say that this is not the first time, obviously, that the United States government has provided assistance. In fact, this threshold program will be added to a current foreign aid program exceeding \$150 million

in Rwanda that's working in the area of health care, good governance, and economic growth, but we believe it's exactly the right additional increment that will help achieve the government of Rwanda's vision for the future.

I -- I welcome the opportunity to be here today. USAID looks forward to working with the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the government of Rwanda in taking this threshold program forward, and I think it's a wonderful day where we all can look forward to translating the enthusiasm that we feel in this room today into concrete progress for the people of Rwanda.

And now it is my great pleasure to welcome to the podium the honorable James Musoni, minister of finance for the government of Rwanda.

(APPLAUSE)

MUSONI: Thank you so much, Mr. Kunder, excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, friends of Rwanda gathered here. It's my pleasure and honor to be here today on behalf of the government of Rwanda for the signature of the MCC Rwanda threshold program agreement.

This occasion serves to iterate our commitment to bring about social and economic prosperity for the people of Rwanda. This threshold program will be used to further enforce our government's efforts and strategies of reducing poverty within our Vision 2020 and the economic development and poverty reduction strategy.

The challenges in Rwanda are not too different from those faced by other developing countries, although we have our own unique situation inherited from the 1994 genocide. This program comes at a critical time as we continue to be faced with a multitude of enormous challenges.

During our struggle for a better Rwanda, we've demonstrated our commitment to sound policies and programs that promote political and economic freedom, investments in our people, the fight against corruption, respect for civil liberties and the rule of law. The MCC's threshold program fits well within our longtime vision for a democratic society built on a civil persuasion (ph), the development of professional media, strong institutions, and rests on judicial independence and democratic principles.

The modest socioeconomic and political progress of achievement in the past 14 years reassures us that our country is on the right path. The recently concluded joint governors' assessment done by government and development personnel indicated significant improvements in all areas of governance. The program objectives and efforts of MCC are in line with the key recommendations of the joint governors' assessment, and we are confident that the associates from the MCC will provide an opportunity to fast track the implementation of these accommodations.

On behalf of the government of Rwanda, I want to thank the board and the management of MCC and the United States Agency for International Development for having worked hard to bring us this far. The government of Rwanda will continue to work with all of you towards the successful implementation of threshold country program.

I am confident and I am sure (inaudible) that this agreement is an important milestone and another step towards the signature of the full compact agreement between the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the government of Rwanda.

I thank you so much for invitation.

(APPLAUSE)

BENT: Now that we've whetted your appetite, I think it's time for the main meal. If Mr. Musoni and Jim could proceed to the table -- already being seated -- we'll now sign the agreement.

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

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