



1,000 miles for a healthier Africa

Greetings everyone,

December 1st marks the beginning of my favourite time of year – a time of warmth, of family, of love. December 1st this year, however, did not bring the joy that so often accompanies the beginning of the holiday season. It was instead marked by feelings of anger, of frustration, of disheartenment. December 1st coincides not only with Christmas window displays but with another far more significant event - World AIDS Day. And while many were rejoicing at the reduction in global HIV prevalence and infection rates (which I mean not to disregard), I had trouble joining in the celebration. I was instead frustrated with an announcement that came just five days before World AIDS Day, during Stephen Harper's inaugural trip to Tanzania – a country where 9 percent of the adult population is currently living with HIV/AIDS. Prime Minister Harper took his visit as an opportunity to unveil a new initiative of which Canada is a part – the Initiative to Save a Million Lives. Aside from boasting a lofty goal, this new Initiative has several flaws – the first being that it isn't really new. Prime Minister Harper announced the project as evidence of Canada's renewed commitment to increasing aid, yet it accomplishes anything but. The \$100 million that Canada is contributing to the \$500 million project is part of the \$450 million that Mr. Harper had already pledged in 2005 as the "African Health Systems Initiative." Same money, new flashy name.

Project Snapshot

The Project: To run and climb 1,000 miles in support of and solidarity with people in Africa who have been excluded from their right to health

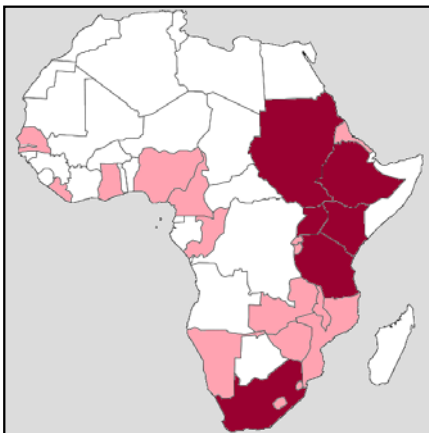
The Run: The ING Ottawa Marathon, May 25th 2008

The Climb: Mount Kilimanjaro Ascent, June 25th - July 6th 2008

The Goal: To raise \$15,000 for AMREF

I have often heard the argument in the development world that "any money is better than no money." Yet I have to constantly wonder, should we really set the bar for the world's poor so low? The only violence greater than that exacted by the *trillion* dollars spent in arms and military expenditure every year is the violence exacted by the comparative pennies spent on human development. By the complacency with which we applaud the Canadian government for saving a million lives over five years while 1.7 million will be lost to AIDS this year alone, and that's only on the African continent. I don't believe that we who care about achieving a more just and equitable world should have to settle or feel grateful for such token gains. I believe,

Where does AMREF work?



as the name of this newsletter suggests, in an alternative route (and my thanks to my beloved partner Kris for having the creative wit to come up with it). In which each individual being is accorded equal value, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or political or economic power. In which human wellbeing is not sacrificed for material gain. Each person will find her or his own 'route' for helping to achieve such a world. Mine, for the time being, is to the finish line of a marathon and the summit of a mountain. I hope that by sharing my own route with you I encourage you to seek out your own. For I believe that we all have the right to wish for a better world, and the responsibility to work to achieve it. Thank you for taking the time to read about my project; please give as generously as your own financial means allow. My kindest wishes for a safe and peaceful holiday season for you and your loved ones.

In peace,

Mandy

*Please note that the views expressed in this newsletter are my own and not necessarily those of AMREF. This project is one that I have taken on beyond my official role as AMREF's programme coordinator and as such the opinions I share herein are as an independent third party.

Please visit www.givemeaning.com/project/kilimanjaroclimb08 to learn more or to donate.



AMREF Receives Body Mapping Grant

I am thrilled to announce that AMREF has been granted funding from the HIV/AIDS Small Grants Programme, a joint initiative of the Canadian Society for International Health and Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development. This funding will allow staff from our Tanzania office to attend training that will teach them how to lead and support women in “*body mapping*” – a form of art therapy that allows women to create beautiful pieces of art that depict their own journeys living with HIV/AIDS. Body mapping workshops are currently being conducted in Eastern Africa by the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) and the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI). The products of these workshops are visually stunning, each telling the unique strengths and stories of a woman who is HIV-positive. They are currently on display at the Ontario Science Centre, so if you are in the Toronto area, I encourage you to check them out!

Visit CATIE's website to learn more:
<http://www.catie.ca/bodymaps/index.shtml>



What's on my Christmas wish list?

If I could ask for one thing this Christmas, it would be this: 0.7%. In 1969, Canada's own Lester B. Pearson set a target goal for development assistance, a goal endorsed by the United Nations and all of the world's most developed nations. The aim was that each country would give 0.7% of its annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in official development assistance (ODA) to less developed nations – a means of redistributing wealth from richer countries to poorer ones. This target was originally set to be achieved by 1975. Yet nearly 40 years later, Canada's level of development assistance still falls dismally short.

The closest that Canada has ever come to achieving the 0.7% target was in 1986, when it peaked at 0.5%. Today it is a shameful 0.33. Far less economically robust countries than Canada have achieved or surpassed the 1969 target, including Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. Denmark has given an exemplary 1.0 percent of its Gross National Product to less developed countries since 1992. While Prime Minister Stephen Harper has committed to raising ODA to 0.5% by 2010 (a modest goal considering it was first achieved over twenty years ago), Canada's Finance Department estimates that the country's ODA will actually fall to 0.29. There is but one reason for the Canadian government's repeated failure to meet such a basic and attainable goal – a lack of will.

What you can do:

If attaining more and better aid for less developed countries is something that resonates with your personal values, here is a brief action plan to get you started...

- Sign on to the Make Poverty History campaign at www.makepovertyhistory.ca
- Use the Make Poverty History website to tell Prime Minister Harper and the Canadian Senate that you care about more and better aid
- Ask your friends, family and co-workers to sign on to Make Poverty History as well

“Do not be paralyzed by fear and do not be anaesthetized by false hope, by illusory dreams. But do live what is possible through courage, choice and an irreducible respect for human dignity.”

-Dr. James Orbinski, Dignitas International