

Walk for Education World Wide

Speech delivered by *David Kenneth Waldman*

November 25 2004 Kampala, Uganda, East Africa

Hon Rebecca Kadaga, distinguished government dignitaries,— Honored Heads of Schools, Honored teachers, parents, Respected leaders of non-governmental organizations that have joined us today, Devoted Director and musicians of the Kampala Brass Band, to the talented school children that share their exceptional presentations with us today, my dear friend, colleague and partner in educational development David Lubaale and the Guest of Honor our children, I am privileged to be counted among such venerable company, on this occasion of the Walk for Education World Wide 2004.

I am here today to address the issue of the 121 million children who have no access to education in the world. I am here today to tell each and every one, that the money needed to bring all children to school if the world's political will were present, can be found. I am here today because I believe in miracles. Yes, the old fashioned kind where human spirit, determination, and belief in a power that is generated when all of us act collectively toward a common good bring exceptional results.

Collectively we are here to let children speak out for children who are disenfranchised, have no voice and no access to an education. Collectively we can, and we will, set education as our number one priority so that our children, our family's, our communities, our nation, and our world will be built on a solid base. Then all the world's children and nations will lead humankind into the rest of the 21st century initiating new groundwork for peace, prosperity, health and environmental issues. This is what Walk for Education World Wide means to me.

Walk for Education World Wide, initiated by To Love Children Educational Foundation International, has been made possible and realized by the people and children of India, Brazil, Nigeria, The United States, Kenya, and Nepal, 1,300 children from six countries are adding their voice to yours in Uganda. Walk for Education World Wide has been endlessly inspired by non-governmental organizations like The Global Campaign for Education, NETAID, CARE, and the Basic Education Coalition, and encouraged by the work of famous organizers including Bono, who recently joined forces in Philadelphia to rally Americans and the United States government to commit an additional 1% of its budget to end global poverty, and the 95 million people whose votes of support in 2001-2002 to "educate every child" from adults and children worldwide in the Say Yes for Children Campaign.

Indicating that the time has come to make education a priority issue, in June of this year, an additional one million people from 110 countries participated in an annual Action Week to demand every child's right to go to school. We are all here because we believe that Education is the key to unlocking poverty. On this day I stand before you with our honored guests, the children, distinguished and most respected friends from many different sectors in Ugandan society to unite our voices to the call for a quality education for all children world wide that is sustainable, child centered, with community and family involvement.

The question that begs to be answered today is; can our children influence governmental leaders to make education a reality for all children? Education matters, consider this quote by --Aung San Suu Kyi Nobel Peace Prize Laureate leader of Burma's democracy movement "*the education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.*" Boys and girls sitting together in the classroom are a powerful and unstoppable force for human capacity to grow and excel in the sciences, arts, and humanities. It will allow all children to reach closer to the potential of the human mind's capability.

We have our challenges. We are mindful of the recent United Nations Human Development Report this year that shows for example that while the Dominican Republic has seen vast improvement in its primary schooling level, Angola has seen a dramatic drop. The report concludes that at the current pace Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet its Millennium goal on Universal Primary Education until 2129...2129 ... *a Hundred and Twenty Five years from now.*

I see as I stand with you today that we can make a difference. That we stand united in many ways; united as citizens of the world, united as a group of people that place education high on the list of important endeavors for a nation's development, and united in our unconditional love for children.

How will we provide education for 121 million children? Let me tell you what I think. But let that be just the beginning. Let it lead you in your own forums, schools, government offices, businesses, nonprofit organizations and local communities to decide what is best for the needs of Uganda as a nation.

Education needs opportunity, world class resources and materials, and free access at the primary level through 18 years of age. Such is the founding goal of our Universal African Resource Center and Library opening in Kampala this year. Education needs vocational training, with a school to work program, Health, Environment, Economic and Peace education that works with clinics, organizations, businesses, schools, and the tools to implement knowledge learned. It needs an early childhood program that starts with infants and through developmentally appropriate practices educationally nurtures children through their fifth birthday. It relies on training for *all* teachers in child-centered, child friendly education programs; training that is age and developmentally appropriate and leads to best practices that meet Ugandan and International standards.

Education needs training on gender sensitivity, child abuse awareness, and education needs access to all that seek to obtain and qualify for higher learning at a University. Education needs life long learning opportunities with classes and workshops for all that want to expand their learning and to experiment for example; how to play an instrument, learn the latest technology, discover new skills and to continue to acquire the means to question, enrich and improve their quality of life. I will work with the leaders in Uganda to continue your long and proud leadership in education so that Uganda leads the way for the rest of Africa and for the world. And *yes* that means education needs friends and partners working together for the benefit of the children.

In the pursuit of quality education for all, To Love Children needs the support at the community level along with the support of NGO's and the overarching support of the government of Uganda, businesses, and parents. I have been deeply honored by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament of the Republic of Uganda the Right Hon Rebecca Kadaga with her unrelenting support for To Love Children enabling us to provide educational opportunities with every resource that is available to us at this time. Hon Kadaga shows her dedication and her support for education for her beloved fellow citizen's every day. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Hon Rebecca Kadaga for her support and to send our best wishes and warm gratitude from the Board of Directors of To Love Children.

This is the way forward in creating a sustainable educational development policy; working as a community, coming together in the best interests of the whole nation's children. Education is the pillar. The entire nation benefits both by supporting it and by building upon its strength for further development.

What is Education? First and foremost it is leading children and adults to ask essential questions. To research, read, explore, and discuss the world around you and to use this knowledge to increase your human potential. Education is the process of absorbing information, opinion, facts, and experiences. Through synthesis and then analysis the brain tempered by culture, experience, genetics, traditions and intellectual (as well as emotional) intelligence helps one to make decisions that are thoughtful and critical of the consequences.

Our most famous American novelist, Mark Twain, frequently noted for his witticisms stated that *“Education does not occur solely in the classroom, I have never let my schooling interfere with my Education”* Sir Winston Churchill declared *“I am always ready to learn, but I do not always like being taught.”*

I too loved the product and not always the process of education. Quality education for all means a child centered approach so that we engage our children in the love of being educated. To seek out learning as the Chinese proverb says so well, *“If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.”* Education is the best investment tool a society can make.

An education however, that takes place exclusively in the classroom, does not go far enough. It is not applicable to the multilateral needs of the world in the 21st century. Schools, books and curriculum alone do not create an educational system that overarches real-life learning opportunities for children. The ability to ask essential questions and to think critically, the acquisition of vocational skills, literacy in technology, peace, health and environmental education are all elements of development that, while not traditionally taught in the classroom, are critical to the future of all children and can be given whether learning at home or in a school.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” Said William Butler Yeats

It is education that gives people the resources to reach the full capacity of what it means to achieve the human destiny of discovery, exploration, creativity, the arts, science, building a civil society and the building of great civilizations that are remembered for their achievements for humanity and not for their conquests.

As small children grow up they ask their families: “How?” and “Why?” Education comes with everyday experiences such as these, with literacy skills obtained in your occupation as well as reading, writing and arithmetic and the willingness to ask meaningful questions about the life you live. Education is life-long learning, how to research, how to find the knowledge that you need. Education gives you the skills to take what you learn and to communicate it in art, film, song, dance, music, poetry, or in writing laws and policies for a great nation like Uganda that reflect its traditions, history and desire to take its place as a leader among the nations of Africa.

Education needs opportunity, as water needs a dam to channel its potential energy into productive uses for society. Education needs equal access for all children, the street child, the physically and mentally handicapped, the visually impaired, the child soldier, the child sitting in refugee camps, the children sold into slavery and for the 65 million girls not allowed or able to go to school. We remember today the missing children—girls in China and India where girls have little value next to a boy, today with our first annual Walk for Education World Wide we stand up and advocate for all the children. So let our voice be strong and united. And trust, as I do, that a united voice can and will be heard. Children, those of you here today and those of you around the nation, let this campaign continue so that the policy makers around the world will hear your voice. Children today are raising their collective voices for the children most in need as well as for themselves. Let me hear you, and children your nation, teachers, government and family love you. Know that, To Love Children loves you and will add our voice to yours.

I stand here today in awe of the magnitude of the support and participation from the children and adults of the great nation of Uganda. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your celebration of Walk for Education World Wide. To Love Children is launching a yearlong curriculum program to teach our children literacy and the skills they will need to project their voice so that all countries will join together and hear the need for quality and equally-accessible education globally. This is a worldwide celebration of education, so that our children may learn to voice the central fact that no one left out from obtaining an education can ever fully reach their potential.

It was six months ago that the inspiration came to me to have children stand up and advocate for the 121 million children not in school around the world. I reasoned that children speaking up for children's rights to an education would accomplish three goals.

First, It would gain value for the children's appreciation for their own education and teach them to value it more.

Second, It would show children how to participate in civil society and teach them how to express their voice while giving them a venue from which to be heard.

And Third, It would garner the support necessary for those who make local and national policy to ensure that no child is left without the tools necessary to receive an equal education. It would secure the value of education as any nation's *number one priority*.

As you see the children standing today, please allow yourself to be especially aware of the 65 million girls not in school, a sum that equals 2/3 of the 121 million children without any education.

Education for girls is important. Women who have been educated as girls are in a crucial position for enacting and perpetuating positive change for their children and their community. Statistics compiled by UNICEF reveal that an educated girl marries later and has fewer children. Her children are more likely to survive, are better nourished and have better educations. She is more productive at home and better paid in the workplace. She is better able to protect herself against HIV/AIDS and will assume a more active role in social, economic and political decisions throughout her life. She will break the cycle of dependency on outside assistance and, in the end; the funding of her education will be the funding of an enduring solution.

Today, as I've noted, 121 million children are without education. It is a statistic that is staggering to even the most optimistic individual. Remember that, two thirds of these children are girls and, perhaps more telling still, 660 million of their mothers, and the women in their communities, are illiterate. The increase of this trend remains unhindered. These figures grow with each short-changed generation. To Love Children, as an international nongovernmental organization, is committed to targeting this destructive cycle with a method of investment that has proven itself again and again—an investment that focuses on the education of young girls, to create a future that focuses on the betterment of all children, world-wide. We aim to inspire a collaborative drive between all education-focused organizations, a drive that will culminate in a truly independent and lasting solution for developing nations.

All nations are developing in their own manner. In the United States of America, we have our own history of learning to better ourselves as a nation and a people. For years, even as education and opportunity were increasingly made available to all children and public school became free for children through the age of 18, there was another chapter in education that the nation needed to address. Throughout the 18th, 19th and the larger part of the 20th century, African-Americans in the United States were denied equal access to jobs, education and opportunities for advancement. Without equal access to these things, the entire nation, *any nation*, can be diminished in its ability to develop and contribute to the world.

African-Americans, in spite of this injustice made important inventions and discoveries, created great works of art, and excelled in science, music, literature, medicine and sports. They demonstrated through their achievements how crucial it is for all individuals to have open access to the tools of success. Because they came together, as we have today, in unity to demand a natural right to education, the United States began to hold itself to the higher standard of universal equality and constitutional-given rights.

Their talents, perseverance, bravery, and the inspiration they have provided for others have won them the lasting respect of all Americans. It is for the perseverance of their memory that I have selected to read you a few of their names and accomplishments as a source of motivation:

- **Mary McLeod Bethune** worked to help educate African-Americans and worked with four Presidents to further expand educational opportunities.
- **George Washington Carver** was a scientist famous for agricultural research and for discovering the many uses of peanuts.
- **Frederick Douglass a former slave** was an abolitionist, author, and orator advocating for the rights of slaves to all people including President Lincoln
- **Charles Drew** fought against all odds to become a doctor.
- **Matthew Henson**, an African-American explorer, discovered the North Pole with Robert Peary.
- **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement; he won the Nobel Peace Prize for working in peaceful ways to get equal rights for African-Americans
- **Sojourner Truth** was the first African-American woman to travel through the country making speeches against slavery. Overcoming illiteracy and prejudice to advocate for the rights of people in bondage.
- **Booker T. Washington** was a teacher who founded the Tuskegee Institute to train African-Americans to become carpenters, farmers, mechanics, and teachers. He said, *"No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."*

Their ancestors come from this great continent of Africa. Like them, the people of Uganda have a number of inspiring firsts. In 1922 Makerewe University became the first African University in East Africa. In 1924, the Ugandan government followed that by beginning the first secondary school for Africans. This started a long history of educational development. History teaches us hope, pride and shows us that we can overcome the obstacles that so many in the world are now faced with just to receive a basic education. Uganda is showing the way for the world to see that education matters and that universal primary education for all the children is a priority of the government.

Walk for Education World Wide ends this week with children standing up for education for the 121 million children not in school in Nepal, Nigeria, India, Brazil, Kenya, Uganda and the USA. It is the culmination of a good first year. Now the work of advocacy begins. To Love Children will create a WEW curriculum to teach children economics, international relations, geography, presentation skills, writing skills, and how to research so that they are better prepared to become global citizens. Schools will create themes that allow children to contact policy makers, and invite them to their schools to speak. The curriculum will allow children to advocate for children so that upon inheriting the world they will be sensitive and engaged. We can trust that even if change does not appear immediately, it will be evident when millions and millions of children grow up in the coming decades insisting on education for all.

There are many obstacles to granting educational equality for both girls and boys. But obstacles are not the message I intend for my talk today. The list of names that I read just before, names of men and women who faced similar and overwhelming obstacles before achieving their great goals, remember that they *did* overcome their challenges. They gave back to society and the world when it seemed impossible. They made their message immutable. **That** is the message I want to leave you with. Overcome the disinterest of the world and listen to your children, as the words they have to say will be the immutable history of tomorrow. They will end the disinterest. They will end the notion of impossibility. Look to them, they are both our greatest mission and our greatest hope.

If you will indulge me I would like to end my talk today with a poem I wrote especially for this occasion.

Listen to your Children

In commemoration of the First Annual WEW—November 25 2004

Listen to your Children

I am small and defenseless,

My cries are my language,

I am your child.

Listen to my needs.

My eyes see the world with wonder
filled with incomprehensible miracles.

Your love softens the way forward.

Listen to my request for knowledge.

My heart fills with joy as I take
my first steps towards independence.

Your love paves the way.

Listen to my enthusiasm to embrace life.

My hands touch the world to make
sense of my environment.

Your love encourages my creativity.

Listen to my wanting to explore and learn.

My mouth learns your native tongue,
and starts to question.

Your love begins my learning.

Listen, my words have meaning for feelings that lie in
my heart.

My mind engages the world,

I reach out and I start to fly. I

create art and music, I explore the micro and
macro of the universe.

Your love opened the door.

Listen as I have something to contribute.

I am your child, I am also the child
of the Universe. I am everyone's child.

The village's child, the nation's child's
the world's child.

Listen to me I am a citizen of this community,
of this great nation Uganda and of the world.

Opportunity, Tolerance and peace,
are the doors to my mind and heart.

Love is the return on your investment.

Listen to me I love you.

Education is the path to my development.

Love unlocked the doors.

Thank you for listening to me.

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This is the beginning of the journey for To Love Children to advocate for the education of all children not in school. Yet, as Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations recently wrote "there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls." To Love Children is proud to become a partner in Uganda in Education for girls as well as boys. Our Universal Resource Center and Library in Kampala and our proposed second center in Gulu to meet the educational needs of refugee children is one program of many that we hope will bring children to our centers to ask questions, to attend our workshops and to be inspired to go on to higher learning. We are committed to sustainable educational development for the children of Uganda.

I want to publicly thank Hon Rebecca Kadaga, one more time, for her unreserved support of our efforts to bring To Love Children's educational programs to Uganda, to our distinguished guests your presence here today honors me and I am appreciative of your support, to our dedicated and talented volunteers here in Uganda we are privileged to work by your side, the NGO's and schools that have joined me in partnership today your support is enthusiastically welcomed and needed, and most of all the children we see you, we hear you, we will work for sustainable educational development all over the world. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

On a personal note it is a special treat for me to talk about one of your citizens. I am enriched in my work for children because of my partnership with this person, Uganda is enriched as a nation for his citizenship, loyalty and the love he gives that knows no bounds, Africa is enriched to have a noble African working for education for children, the world is enriched because of his humanitarian work, insights and dedication, and children are the beneficiary of one man working with little resources, but with great imagination, a social entrepreneur, who is filled with love of children and humanity, someone I am honored to call friend and brother in the fullest sense of those two words, David Lubaale. Please take a moment with me to recognize David and to thank him for his relentless work and dedication for the children of Uganda, for Africa, the world and playing such an important part of To Love Children as we move together to create sustainable educational development for all children.

Always ask questions, be a lifelong learner, give something back to your community- in volunteer service and become a philanthropist, a social entrepreneur for your nation, and know that TLC and I hear you.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of To Love Children, we salute your dedication to education.

In concert we shall start our advocacy to raise our collective voices, for the voiceless and faceless children that no one hears.

Today is our American holiday called Thanksgiving, I give thanks for my new friendships in Uganda and for the opportunity you have given me today; allowing me this chance to share some of my thoughts with you to celebrate the first annual Walk for Education World Wide 2004.