

Closing Speech by Temmylade Ayo Aladeokin

Civil Society Development Forum (CSDF) 2009 – Geneva Component

Your Excellencies,

To have been asked to deliver the closing address at this conference which in a very literal sense concerns itself with matters of life and death, weighs heavily upon me for the gravity of the responsibility placed on one.

No disrespect is intended towards the many other occasions where one has been privileged to speak, if I say that this is the one event where every word uttered, every gesture made by everyone, had to be measured against the effect it can and will have on the lives of millions of concrete, real human beings all over the planet.

Now, however, the ordinary people of the continent and the world – and particularly the poor who on our continent, will again carry a disproportionate burden of this scourge – would, if anybody cared to ask their opinions, wish that the dispute about the primacy of politics or science be put on the backburner and that we proceed to address the needs and concerns of those suffering and dying.

I come from a long tradition of collective leadership, consultative decision-making and joint action towards the common good. We have overcome much that many thought insurmountable through an adherence to those practices. In the face of the grave threat posed by threats to Health, we have to rise above our differences and combine our efforts to save our people. History will judge us harshly if we fail to do so now, and right now.

The challenge is to move from rhetoric to action, and action at an unprecedented intensity and scale. There is a need for us to focus on what we know works.

For this there is need for us to be focused, to be strategic, and to mobilise all of our resources and alliances, and to sustain the effort

I thank all of you most sincerely for your involvement in that struggle

I believe that by working together to enable people to take charge of their own health destiny, we all can find a new relevance in their lives because as everyone knows, your health determines everything from wealth to happiness. Increasingly, good health is a prime objective of our ageing society.

The broad concept of ‘good health’ identifies health not only as a key element of individual welfare and happiness.

But good health is also fundamental to changes in the broader societal context – for social cohesion, for increasing life-long productivity and for long term economic sustainability.

We need to broaden our horizons. We must focus more on the prevention of serious illnesses, both physical and mental, wherever possible, and on minimizing the effects of illness when they do arise.

We need to put in place the conditions to enable people not only to live longer, but also to make their full contribution to society – To add life to their years and not just years to their life.

And this requires an approach that covers many different areas. As the health of individuals, and of populations, is influenced by a wide range of factors.

We must seek to empower people to assume responsibility for their health. We must also help public authorities, social and economic operators to play their part in creating healthy conditions of course, conditions that promote health.

This involves work at many different levels – from local communities, through regions and countries, right up to international and even global level.

The Civil Society Development Forum has ways that they can make tangible contribution to improving the health of the world. We have deliberated on focusing on citizens and patients choice: to make reliable information on health available to everyone, and to promote their active participation in the health decision-making process. We have also talked about promoting health as a driver of economic growth, sustainable development and quality of life. We want to support cooperation between health systems to improve the use of scarce resources and access to expertise and best practice.

Our philosophy must be that we then take responsibility for improving the outcomes of our services in terms of access, but we work alongside people who suffer from inequalities to help them to improve the conditions to make better choices by them for them.

What we need from you today is some lively thinking outside the box about the individuals and communities we serve, and about what will make it easier for them, for all of them to 'choose health'.

I am proud that the present leadership of CONGO has made clear its commitment to put young people at the centre of the services and policies that affect them. In order to achieve this, we must all make sure that young people are given the opportunity to express their views, and make sure that we listen.

I am proud of the work we have all done on participation and involvement.

And we look for ways of ensuring that sustainable strategies are built and for creative ways of making sure our services are really relevant to what people need.

Thank you for showing your commitment to this by coming today and taking the challenge back with you.

Have a safe trip back to your countries.