

September 21, 2007

Jane Meyers' Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the First Lubuto Library

This inauguration is a momentous occasion. The library that we are celebrating today is unique, and it is the first of at least 100 we plan to build. Its architecture, which is based on indigenous styles, was conceived to create a profound, safe and welcoming space for the children it was built to serve, and to re-connect them with society. It is a concrete and enduring recognition that they are important and cared-for members of the Zambian and international communities and a reminder that making the effort to help them to thrive will enrich all of our lives – and society as a whole. This library is beautiful and special, but it is much more than a building filled with shelves of books. For the young people assembled with us today and for many others who will find their way here, it is a refuge from life on the streets, a place where they can just be children, and where books will allow them to dream and envision a better future. It is not an extravagance but, rather, simultaneously, an obligation and a reward.

In fact, a Lubuto Library is probably a very different institution from what most of you ever thought a library to be. We ask those reaching out to Lusaka's street children to tell them about the library, but not to use the word library. We want the children to hear that, at the Fountain of Hope, there is a place called "Lubuto" that is there just for them. Whether or not they can read or speak English, let them come to find for themselves what we have to offer, come and show us what they need and how our libraries can meet those needs.

Lubuto Libraries provide complete library collections of excellent children's books. These carefully selected collections are balanced and comprised of relevant and top quality materials on all levels. They are as fine as can be found anywhere. The initial 4,000-volume collection that we install is a foundation, to be supplemented by books in Zambian languages, as well as other locally-acquired materials. New books, based on traditional Zambian

stories, will be created by a new Zambia Board on Books for Young People established jointly by the

Lubuto Project and the Zambia Library Association. Through this organization, Zambians in various fields of the arts and literature will produce and publish bilingual children's books that will benefit both the children served by Lubuto and Zambian society at large.

The library's staff will set up a regular schedule of programs in which adult volunteers read aloud to the children, and the children read to one another. The Lubuto Project will train the staff and assist in mobilizing volunteers for these programs through the Zambia Library Association and other civic and charitable organizations. The Lubuto Project will partner with literacy experts to introduce literacy programs through the libraries. With the help and guidance of our Advisory Board member Mulenga Kapwepwe, the libraries will feature storytelling, poetry and story reading, singing, drama, art, and related activities to enhance the lives of the children and promote self-expression and literacy acquisition.

In this library, some children will learn to read, and others will improve their reading skills. Based on past experience, we have reason to expect that it will help more than a few children to reach the standard required for entrance into secondary education and a path to stable and productive careers. At the same time, we assign no less importance to those children who will come only to hear stories read, or to soar beyond the limits of the street through picture books that span the range from the vistas of outer space to the bed of the ocean floor.

For still others, the arts and drama offerings in the library's activity center will ignite a new means of self-expression and pride when their accomplishments are appreciated by society. Drama, music, art and storytelling are particularly nurturing endeavors to be carried out in Lubuto Libraries, since those media are traditional ways of conveying information and values from one generation to the next in Zambia.

Because Lubuto libraries are designed to attract hard-to-reach users, they can also communicate important information on health and educational services to orphans and vulnerable children in Zambia. HIV/AIDS and other health materials geared for our target group are actively acquired and

included in Lubuto collections and programming. Rooted in the community and staffed by the host organization, Lubuto Libraries will become significant centers of connection and communication, engendering partnership with health programs to make the libraries critical conduits for prevention and care messages via various media, including drama. Sensitivity to the psychosocial needs of the children we serve is a central facet of our programming.

Today, President Kaunda, storyteller Leonard Mpundu and the Barefeet Theater will help us show you some of the myriad ways that Lubuto Libraries will illuminate the lives of the marginalized children we serve. While fostering reading literacy is an obvious objective of a library, Lubuto Libraries actively impart cultural and information literacy as well. Libraries link the past, present and future, and our wonderful buildings will be a refuge where children can connect with their cultural past and the community around them, and cultivate skills and hope for the future.

We have arrived at this point because of the generosity and hard work of many people, in Zambia, the United States and elsewhere. I hope you will take time to read the names of the many dozens of contributors listed in the program.

I would like to recognize the designer of this library, whose tireless labor of love over the past several years has transformed her vision into reality, the Lubuto Project's Regional Director in Zambia, Eleni Coromvli. Eleni and I would like to thank our contractor Paul Snart and a host of others (who are named in the program) who fashioned these inspirational buildings. I would especially like to mention that several of those who contributed to the construction were street children themselves -- Jerry Phiri, Charles Tembo and Joseph Tembo.

You will see in the program and in our annual report that Lubuto's work has been financed by numerous monetary donations from individuals and organizations in the U.S., Zambia and internationally. We are especially grateful to this library's primary benefactor, Marilyn Hollinshead. But we have also received very generous financial contributions in Zambia, including those from the Hellenic Association and kind members from Zambia's Greek community. Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of our financial support has come from many,

many big and small donations from people in the library, book and publishing professions.

Zambian organizations also joined U.S. ones in providing in-kind services and donating supplies. Here, we are extremely grateful to Associated Printers, BDO Accountants, British Airways and Ellis & Co. for their essential support, and to Plascon and Zdenakie Group for donated construction materials. For in-country transport of books, we thank the Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development. For volunteering their talents and services so that Lubuto Libraries may become truly excellent centers of enrichment and expression, we offer our ongoing thanks to:

- Naomy Mtanga and library studies students of the Univ. of Zambia;
- Benson Njobvu and the Zambia Library Association;
- Memoir author and former street kid Humphrey Mulenga;
- Artist Mwamba Mwangala, whose art work with the children is on display in the library's activities building;
- Adam McGuigan, Taonga Tembo and Nicholas Mwila of Barefeet Theatre.

We are especially appreciative of continuous support we have received from Government, particularly from the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development and the Ministry of Education. Finally, our warmest thanks for making today's event possible go to the staff of the Fountain of Hope and to:

- Associated Printers, Ltd.
- The Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Zambia
- The Hellenic Association of Zambia
- The Holiday Inn
- INVESCO Ltd.
- The United States Embassy

And to:

- Mark Chona
- Priscilla Frost-d'Elbée
- Christine MacDonald
- Dipak Patel
- John C. Zulu

And, of course, to those who honor us with their participation in this celebration, especially the First Republican President, Dr. Kaunda.

Finally, I want to remind our very honored guests today, the street kids and other vulnerable children, that all of this effort is for you. Everyone who contributed in any way did so because they care about you and want to help make your lives better. As you are enveloped in these beautiful buildings and are enlightened and transported by their offerings, please experience that as the continual expression of love that it is.