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AN INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY EVENT

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P R O C E E D I N G S

DR. SHAH: Thank you, and good morning. And welcome to U.S.A. for World Literacy Day. I want to thank Richard and the entire education team here at U.S.A. for your great leadership and commitment to children around the world.

We have a special thank you for Representative Lowey that I will save for the conclusion of my remarks because we have with us today Washington -- probably this country's top single advocate for education around the world, and we're honored to have you with us.

I certainly would like to welcome and thank visiting dignitaries. As Richard has mentioned, Minister Fuad Ibrahim, Abel Fernandes de Assis, Mator Kpangbai and Guillermo Lopez.

We really appreciate your participation today. The experiences of your countries and your leadership, and we are really looking to learn from some of your specific examples, as I'll mention in a few moments.

And then a special welcome for our colleagues from Brookings, the World Bank, our co-sponsors from the Education For All -- Fast Track Initiative. The fact that everyone's worked together for nearly a decade now to dramatically expand access to education gives us the opportunity to focus on literacy outcomes, which will be our focus going forward.

Since the launch of the Millennium Development Goals, the world has seen significant strides in education through the efforts of education ministries and their partners around the world. Developing countries have moved nearly 28 million more children into classrooms over the last decade by abolishing school fees, building new facilities and being relentlessly focused on making sure that every child born anywhere has access to an education.

In fact, today, more than 90 percent of children in developing countries are enrolled in some form in primary school.

But our job as development professionals and government leaders is to always ask the question, "To what end?" Our responsibility does not end when a girl first steps through the doors of a classroom. We have to make sure that she actually has the tools to learn something in that setting.

Unfortunately, a focus on universal access has come, to some extent, at the expense of children receiving a high quality education everywhere around the world. Even as we've seen these

record numbers of children enter classrooms, we've seen the quality of learning sharply drop. Today over 60 percent of all schoolchildren around the world -- nearly 200 million girls and boys -- are learning so little that they are struggling to read basic words.

In some countries, the situation is much worse. In Mali, 80 percent of schoolchildren couldn't read a single word at the end of second grade. By the end of sixth grade, after spending half their lives in school, nearly half of them still couldn't read basic words.

Packing children into classrooms without helping them learn is not an education. It's daycare. Without a motivated teacher, without quality learning materials, without clear targets and effective monitoring, children will have little hope of gaining the promise of walking through those school doors.

At U.S.A., we fundamentally transformed our approach to education to help address this crisis in quality. We're not going to measure our success by the number of children in school. We're going to measure it by the number of children who can read and add by the time they leave.

We're not going to measure our success by the number of teachers we train at hotel ballrooms or in international conferences. We're going to measure it by the effectiveness they demonstrate in the classroom, as measured by child outcomes.

And we're not going to measure our success based on the anecdotes we're told by our consultants and our contractors. We're going to use sophisticated and modern monitoring and evaluation techniques to ensure what we're doing generates results.

As part of our broader U.S.A. Forward reform effort, we're shifting our emphasis away from outputs like kids in school or teachers trained, and towards real results like literacy.

This was the vision behind our new education strategy, which we launched in February, and it's also part of a widespread effort across our agency to ensure that every taxpayer dollar we spend is getting real results for the American people and for the people around the world we hope to support and serve.

As part of our new education strategy, we developed early grade learning and math assessments designed to help teachers understand the specific needs of their students and their classrooms. These tools are already making a difference on the ground, changing the way entire nations

approach education.

With our support, the Liberian Ministry of Education -- we hope to hear more about this later -- has researched baseline childhood literacy, then set up a randomized control trial to test the effectiveness of early grade reading assessments. That trial showed conclusively that continued one on one assessments of student performance led to a two to three time increase in child literacy. As a result, they're now scaling up these interventions to reach most of the country.

In Honduras, studies revealed that weekly curriculum calendars were the most effective intervention in supporting actual learning gains, keeping teachers and students on track and on schedule. Today these calendars have been adopted by the Education Ministry and expanded nationwide.

In fact, each of the Education Ministries represented here today has a specific operational innovation that has significantly improved actual results for children.

Mozambique is planning to conduct a nationwide reading assessment. Ethiopia, like Liberia, has conducted one and is now committed to developing national reading programs. And Nicaragua has already has taken their evidence-based program to scale.

By focusing on literacy and measuring impact, our new strategy will help improve the reading skills of 100 million children by 2015. That goal is an ambitious one. It's also one that operates now under new constraints in a much more austere budget environment.

But it's important that we remember that helping a girl learn not only brightens her future, it brightens ours as Americans. It energizes our economy by strengthening global economic growth and developing markets for our exports.

In fact, a 10 percent increase in basic literacy translates into a 0.3 percent increase in GDP. It helps protect our own shores by reducing the pull of conflict and violent extremism around the world, and we know this is true based on actual studies done by Brookings and others.

In Afghanistan, we've helped provide an education to nearly eight million children, 35 percent of whom are girls who otherwise would not be in school.

And what Congresswoman Lowey perhaps best articulates is that our investment in global education is a core expression of American values, of dignity, of opportunity, of the freedom that that education provides.

I was reminded of that just this Tuesday, the first day of school for my two young children. I was able to personally take the kids to school to meet their teachers and to see their classrooms. And I left knowing that each day my children would come home from school and have stories to tell, not just about going to school but about what they learned there about the curriculum, about the content and the enthusiasm that comes with actual learning.

I suspect many of us in this room share that experience and many of us in this room know that for millions of families around the world, they don't get that experience.

Because ensuring that quality education in childhood is so important to global prosperity and global security, it has brought together a bipartisan community of supporters and leaders. Former First Lady Laura Bush described education as the bedrock of a successful nation, working hard to expand educational opportunities to children around the world. In fact, just five years ago, she hosted the first-ever White House conference on global literacy.

On the other side of the aisle, we have Congresswoman Lowey who, throughout her career, has maintained a steady fight for increased funding for children with disabilities, teacher development and literacy programs here and around the world.

Under her leadership, federal funding for after school programs has increased from $1 million to more than $1 billion. She has cosponsored legislation to reduce class size and wrote the first bill to provide federal funding for school modernization so children can learn with the benefits of technology. And now we're trying to bring that technology around the world.

Congresswoman Lowey's commitment extends beyond our borders, to every child everywhere. And that's why it's an absolute honor to have her here and a pleasure to present her with our first-ever 2011 Literacy Champion Award. And I'm going to show you --

(Applause)

The award reads, "In recognition of your tireless efforts to champion global literacy and education, your vision, tenacity and leadership have successfully transformed the lives of millions of young girls and boys, and contributed to U.S. national security. Thank you."

(Applause)

I'll now let Congresswoman Lowey share her remarks with us, but I thought it would be

helpful to put an achievement like that in some context.

And if you look at the slide that's up there, that was taken from a recent trip where I visited South Sudan. And the kids in that picture are in second grade, second standard. They range in age from six to 13 because many of them have not had a chance to be in school before. They are the beneficiaries of a program that has been studied rigorously that uses radio technology to have a structured curriculum in the classroom, and we know that that has resulted in improved learning outcomes.

But I want to point out that for every girl that you see in that photograph, statistically today in Southern Sudan, they are more likely to die in childbirth than to complete a secondary education.

And I would just make the commitment or observation that no country is going to be stable and secure, and our world is not going to be stable and secure so long as those statistics remain true.

With that, Congresswoman Lowey.

(Applause)

REPRESENTATIVE LOWEY: Good morning. So many good friends who are here today, and I'm happy to join on this panel with Dan Wagner, Richard Whelden and all the Ministers of Education and so many friends in this room at U.S.A. and other of our agencies who have been working with me, and I truly want to share this award. This is a great, great honor and unexpected, and I really, really appreciate it.

I thank you, Administrator Shah, for your very kind introduction, for your leadership, for your dedication to U.S. development efforts, your commitment to maintaining and strengthening U.S.A.'s role as the world's premier development agency and to ensuring to initiatives such as U.S.A. Forward that every dollar we spend on development is used efficiently, effectively and accountably as a model in this climate of economic hardship. We are so fortunate to have Dr. Shah in this position of leadership, and I want to applaud you.

(Applause)

What a pleasure it is to me to be here this morning, to discuss an issue about which I care very deeply. I can think of no better way to make International Literacy Day than to be here with the

experts and leaders you'll be hearing from today, as well as all of you who work tirelessly to achieve universal education for all the world's children.

I have had the opportunity to visit the schools and training programs in a great many countries where we are building the next generation of world leaders. The work you do is invaluable and I thank you.

One of the trips that I will never forget was a few years ago when I traveled to Dada, Pakistan. Has anybody visited my school in Dada, Pakistan? Took about six or seven planes to get there, right?

I was privileged to be there with the delegation to reopen a girls' school. The school had been devastated by an earthquake, but the girls' thirst for knowledge was undiminished. They were so beautiful and so eager and so enthusiastic, and they asked me for computers. They wanted me to send them a science teacher.

Even in that very conservative part of the country, these girls knew that access to quality education brings the promise of a better life.

And that's why we're here today, to discuss strategies that work and explore new approaches to bringing the promise of education to every child throughout the world. We have made progress in recent years, but there's still an estimated 67 million students who are not in primary schools and tens of millions more drop out each year.

Now we all know the facts, but I think it's important to repeat them. Education does lead to economic prosperity and reduces poverty. Each additional year of school adds 10 percent to an individual's earning potential, and on a nationwide scale, boosts the country's GDP by one percent. No country has reached sustained economic growth without achieving near universal primary education.

Education enhances health. Universal primary education would prevent 700,000 HIV cases each year. Children born to mothers who can read are 50 percent more likely to live past the age of five. Girls' education in particular has outsized impacts on a wide spectrum of health outcomes.

Education builds strong communities. Schools can bring together parents, students, teachers and government officials offering services that support and linked up communities and families.

Education promotes democracy and stability. Studies have shown that increased

education leads to decreased risk of civil war.

Education lays the foundation for sound governance and strong institutions, and is not just a building block but a cornerstone of free societies.

And working towards universal education is not only a moral imperative; it is a national security priority. Freer, healthier, more prosperous and more stable societies are resilient against the teachings and recruitment of terrorist organizations.

The mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan may be the frontlines in our battle with Al-Qaeda and its sympathizers, but the real war is against ignorance and fanaticism. That's a battle best fought in the classroom.

And throughout my time in Congress, I've remained committed to increasing the United States' role in achieving universal education. From the time I became ranking member of the House Foreign Operations Subcommittee in 2001 and throughout my four years as chair, I successfully increased, from a lot of help from you and my colleagues, funding for basic education, as Dr. Shah said, from $100 million to a high of $925 million in FY 2011.

However, in this particularly challenging times, when budgets must be cut, foreign aid becomes an easy target. And so it is our job, each and every one of us, to make sure that every member of Congress and every American understands just how important these programs are. Now is the time to invest in what works, and we know that promoting basic education is amongst the wisest investments we can make for our security, our economy and our standing around the world. Scaling back these programs means scaling back our own national security and economic prosperity.

It's also an appropriate time to be looking at ways that each dollar can go further and have the most impact. That's why I hope that this can be the first year that the United States contributes to the education for all Fast Track Initiative. This multilateral effort to address the challenges of achieving universal education will leverage each U.S. dollar with contributions from other donor countries, as well as -- and this is critical -- contributions from each partner country and will augment the United States' bilateral efforts across the globe.

But funding is not enough, which is why I, along with Congressman Dave Reichert, have reintroduced the Education for All Act. This bill places the United States squarely in a leadership role in

the march for access to education worldwide. To achieve the goal of universal quality basic education, the Education for All Act lays out U.S. policy that includes working with other countries, multilateral institutions, civil society, to assist developing countries in providing children with equality, basic education and strengthening their education systems.

The bill supports activities that train teachers, build schools, develop effective curricula. It also recognizes that it is imperative to focus on strategies for reaching the most disadvantaged children -- girls who live in poor remote areas, children in conflict zones, child laborers, those with disabilities, victims of human trafficking and children who are orphaned or negatively impacted by HIV/AIDS.

The Education for All Act requires that basic education be inclusive in all comprehensive U.S. development strategies and it creates an Education for All coordinator position to help improve the coordination and effectiveness of all U.S. government agencies' education assistance programs.

Passing the Education for All Act will be a big step forward, but it can't take the place of the many small steps that each of you takes each day to provide a quality education for children everywhere.

The work you've been doing, including the development of U.S. aid to education strategy and the Center for Universal Education's global compact on learning helps move us closer and closer to our shared goals.

May our conversation today with leaders in the field, including representatives from several countries that are working to achieve universal education, inspire us all to keep marching with a renewed commitment to global education.

On Sunday, we will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. It will be a day of sadness, of reflection and a time to remember those we lost on that horrific day. But it will also be a day when we can commit to redouble our efforts to defeat global terrorisms, to stamp out the roots of fanaticism and ensure that no more innocent civilians are the victims of such heinous crimes.

Our commitment to Education for All is part of that effort, and in fact, the 9/11 Commission concluded that educational opportunity is essential to rooting out terrorism once and for all, because unstable and poorly educated societies are incubators of violence.

Working together, we can make a difference. A commitment to basic education provides

an opportunity for the United States to positively interact with populations around the world while supporting our foreign policy and diplomatic goals.

So I want to conclude by thanking you for this very special award. Thank you all for your work towards universal basic education, and I look forward to working with you as we stride to bring the promise of education to every corner of the globe.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. WAGNER: Well, good morning, everybody. It's so encouraging to hear the words of Director Whelden, Administrator Shah and Representative Lowey.

These are people obviously with broad experience and an ability to make things happen. We need more than ever people like them in order to move forward the global agenda on literacy, and I must say you're also hard acts to follow.

And some of the ideas I'll be talking about have already been broached by the previous speakers, but I think I'll be able to add a few new directions, and that's what I'll be getting to.

Let's start by considering what exactly is our global literacy agenda? Is it to reduce illiteracy by a certain percentage? Is it about increased awareness concerning literacy problems? Should we concentrate more on fundraising or spend more time garnering political will?

These questions and underlying issues they reflect are likely to be familiar to all of us in the room today.

There's no doubt that the precursor issues of political will and greater funding are of critical importance in nearly every sector fighting for social and economic justice, literacy included, and I believe we have come farther down the road toward global literacy than is commonly thought. We have made serious and sustainable progress to date, even if it remains poorly understood by the public and even if there is still much to do.

Where are we now and how far do we need to go? As we've heard already, there are roughly 800 million adults that the U.N. says are illiterate today; cannot read a short paragraph in any language. And it's a number that has not changed much over several decades, and 2/3 of these are women.

Further, as we already heard, the U.N. says 67 million children do not receive any schooling today of school age. Untold millions more children receive schooling so poor that even after several grades, they cannot read a single word.

And as distressing as these statistics are, they present only part of the picture. Looking more broadly from where we, the global community, have come, it's safe to say that significant gains have been made in recent decades.

Many of the world's poorest countries have dramatically increased the percentage of children now in school. Education advantages are especially true for girls, whose rate of participation in many countries is nearly equal to boys, having doubled or tripled in recent years.

The number of schools has also greatly increased, and internet connections have begun to sprout up in remote locations, giving a sense of future possibility to many who have felt previously cut off from the world at large.

Yet one of our biggest challenges today is that while we put millions of children into schools, we have not adequately provided them with quality learning experiences, which must include learning to read -- and of course the previous two speakers also have just cited that point.

One example -- let's just take Uganda, where now 90 percent of the children are enrolled in primary school. And even though Uganda has received a considerable amount of donor support and have developed strong strategic plans, it's still the case that more than half the Ugandan children will drop out before they can complete primary school.

This is just one example of the necessity of improving the quality of learning for children.

And there are many poignant stories of poor children who live in poor countries, showing that even if they have attended school, many, and sometimes a large majority, cannot read a word in any language and have learned little of the curriculum provided to them.

In these poor schools, there are often too many kids -- say, 60 to 70 kids in a single classroom, too few books, poor sanitation and unskilled or absent teachers.

Many of us have heard such stories. Many of us in this room have seen them, directly or in photographs or in visits to similar schools where these situations are endemic today. But unlike a decade or two ago, such classrooms should lead us to think that the world is faced with hopeless

situations that defy good solutions.

Up until fairly recently, the literacy field -- which I've been a part of now for more than three decades -- especially when concerned with resource-limited countries, has accepted the first benchmark of education for all, namely getting kids into school.

Fortunately today, we know -- and as the previous two speakers said as well -- that access is not enough. And I think substantial research in literacy has led to a new phase of development where empirical science and innovation is beginning to impact policies to improve the lives of children and adults now, today.

Contributions have come from higher education think tanks, donor agencies, foundations, governments, NGOs, people such as you in this audience today and from the fields of anthropology, linguistics, psychometrics, medicine, digital technology and more -- and from across the world.

What this means is that we have come farther down the road toward universal literacy. So now is the time to try to imagine a literacy system -- not just an educational system -- that supports reading as part of the fabric of everyday life.

Let's imagine for a moment what this future would look like within the next five to 10 years. At the micro level, there would be inexpensive assessment tools available to identify each child's reading development or reading progress, with information provided back to teachers and parents alike so that everyone knows if learning is actually happening, and in which domains. And we would have teachers who are trained in how to teach reading effectively.

At the macro level, local and national authorities would have monitoring tools that would reveal inequities within classrooms, across schools and across regions. Identification of disparities is crucial for addressing the needs of the most marginalized groups. Just as importantly, these data would be posted on the web so that communities and parents could better understand the learning outcomes of their children. And as some of you well know, this is already happening in parts of India today.

Programmatic interventions would include widely available literacy classes for unschooled mothers because we now know that adult literacy has a significant impact on both learning and health outcomes of children, and creates economic opportunities for an entire family.

We'd have mother tongue instruction for all with appropriate research-based transitions to

second language literacy.

Also, there would be interventions at individual, community and national levels that gather data needed for programmatic adaptation to local circumstances and local needs.

There would be a reduction in data gathering for the sake of regulatory compliance. Rather, with the rapidly growing use of handheld devices, we would provide real-time data on children's progress, school monitoring and on the impact of design interventions.

Again, some of these tools are already available today.

It is not only in the field of healthcare that expediency matters to save lives. In educational terms, failure to act quickly can do real and lasting harm to children's social and economic futures as well.

Finally, let's imagine literacy from the perspective of social justice. National governments would be less likely to see socially and ethically diverse groups as educational problems, but rather as opportunities to create equitable, pluralistic societies. Through the involvement of multiple stakeholders, educational authorities could be held more accountable to their own policies of inclusion.

Children who happen to be born in a remote corner of Ecuador or in inner city Bombay would not be relegated to a life where they are at risk of being an illiterate person who is easily exploited. Geography would no longer be destiny for children in poor places.

Overall, in our more literate future, whether in poor parts of the world or among the disadvantaged in the U.S.A., programs would be empirically driven, time-sensitive and much more transparent to multiple stakeholders. This has already happened in some places some of the time.

What we need to imagine today is that this future is within our view. We can see our way forward, and together we need to make sure the road forward is clear, expected and fought for in the competition for global and national resources.

In sum, our achievements have not been small, even if we have a substantial way to go. This meeting, along with other efforts, will guide us more rapidly than ever before down the road to a more literate world -- and that is something to celebrate on this 2011 International Literacy Day.

Thank you.

(Applause)