

Speech Delivered by

VICE PRESIDENT

JOSEPH NYUMA BOAKAI

At the Pink Charity Fund-raising Ball in support of Breast Cancer Victims

Saturday, January 13, 2007

Freetown, Sierra Leone

YOUR EXECELENCY AND BROTHER DR. AHMED TEJAN KABBA;  
YOUR EMINENCES AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT;  
MS. ISHA TEJAN-COLE, FOUNDER OF THE PINK CHARITY FUND;  
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

Her Excellency your sister and our president Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf extends gratitude for the invitation to serve as Chief Guest of Honor and Honorary Chief Patron at this Pink Charity fundraising ball in support of breast cancer victims. She has asked me extend her deepest regrets for not being here personally, as she had already committed to another urgent call. President Sirleaf also extends her best wishes to you and the people of Sierra Leone for keeping the peace and to the Pink Charity Fund for this worthwhile initiative aimed at raising awareness about breast cancer.

She is fully aware that breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among all women, and the leading cause of cancer death among women aged 40 to 55. By age 80, women have a 1-in-12 chance of developing the disease. But many of these deaths can be prevented, through regular screening and early detection and treatment. In fact, if detected early through self-examination and mammograms, the survival rate for most types of breast cancer will exceed 90 percent.

And, while the number of breast cancer diagnoses continues at an unacceptably high level, the overall survival rate is decreasing due to lack of awareness and the failure of national governments to consider the disease as a national health priority. However, she believes that you are beginning to turn the tide against breast cancer by the launch of this campaign and by the very presence of YOUR EXECELENCY at the launching of this Charity Fund.

Through the phenomenal activities of private groups like the PINK CHARITY, of which HER EXCELLENCY YOUR DEAR SISTER, PRESIDENT MADAM ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF IS HONORARY CHIEF PATRON, you are raising the voice against this silent killer so that governments, NGOs and the private sector can come to the realization that breast cancer too poses a threat to the survival of our women population and not just the so-called frontline diseases such as AIDS, MALARIA, TUBERCULOSIS, ECETERA, ECETERA. Today, more and more women have gotten the message that women in Africa need to get smart and get screened. This campaign should speak to our consciences so that we can join hands and help save and improve thousands of women's lives on the continent. AFRICA can not afford another death threat because we've got enough threats already at our door step.

There is surely a need for governments, INGOs, NGOs and the private sector to support research and public education in this area. With regard to research, we need to work to ensure that statistics on the disease are made available like those on HIV/AIDS on our African continent. These statistics, coupled with the development of ever-more effective diagnostic tools like digital mammography, and through the development of innovative new treatment and preventative drugs, we will slowly but surely begin to get the upper hand against this disease.

But early detection remains the key. That is why initiatives and programs on screening are so important: women aged 40 and above should have annual mammograms and clinical breast examinations; women aged 20 to 39 should have clinical examinations every three years; and all women 20 and over should conduct a breast self-examination every month. These examinations can not, however, be done in the absence of equipment and facilities.

YOUR EXCELLENCY, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, this campaign is just the beginning of the long overdue dialogue and public awareness campaign to save women's lives especially those already affected by the disease. But we still have much to do to match the courage of the PINK CHARITY and to live-up to its vision of the day when all women are appropriately screened and when we defeat breast cancer once and for all.

This sea of pink stirs mixed emotions: I feel a twinge of sadness because of what this color has come to represent: lives lost, and lives changed in drastic and dramatic ways, because of cancer. But I also feel joy and pride, because every speck of pink represents victory and hope for the future.

Technology, science, medical breakthroughs, and each of you give us hope that we will find a cure and put an end to breast cancer. Until that day comes, your organization, with the support of national governments, and humanitarians should continue to press on with the campaign to save lives.

All of us here today know someone who has breast cancer or who has survived it, or who became a victim. This is cause enough for all of us to support this worthy cause.

Our government will surely encourage the extension of this campaign to our country, considering that we share every thing in common as a nation and people. What affects you, affects our people. We have a common identity and so we need to take collective action against whatever or whoever threatens our existence.

In fact, as long as there is a reason to wear pink, there should be a reason to take action to raise awareness about this emerging health catastrophe that threatens our continent. It is the obligation of every woman; every man, every young girl and every well meaning citizen to raise awareness about this disease and hopefully we will find a cure for this disease. We can see the finishing line on the horizon and hand in hand, we will cross it.

YOU EXCELLENCY, BROTHER KABBA, let me conclude by saying a special thank you for the warm reception accorded me and members of my delegation since our arrival here. Thanks for the true friendship and love you have shown to us.

We pledge our support to this fund, and would like to begin with a donation from the Chief Patron, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of TEN THOUSAND UNITED STATES DOLLARS.

MAY ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS US, PROTECT OUR SOUVEREIGNTIES, UNIFY  
US, PRESERVE OUR DIGNITY AND KEEP US SAFE AND PEACEFUL.