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## Former Ambassador, Humanitarian Rouses Founders' Day Convocation

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Former Ambassador, Humanitarian Rouses Founders' Day Convocation  
Feb. 21, 2007

Stephen Lewis' challenge to the Western world came in the form of a question.

"Nothing is greater in this world than the quest for social justice, for equality and humanity. Why else are we on this planet?" he asked.

Lewis, a humanitarian named one of *TIME* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World in 2005, posed his question during a powerful speech at Illinois Wesleyan University during its Founders' Day Convocation on Feb. 21, 2007, in the Westbrook Auditorium.

The speech, entitled "Time to Deliver: Winning the Battle Against Poverty and Disease in the Developing World," called on students of developed nations to understand and battle the AIDS crisis overwhelming the continent of Africa.

"There is no precedent in human history, not even the Black Death in the 14th century that approximates what has happened in Africa over the last number of years," said Lewis, a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations (UN), who chaired the committee that drafted the Five-Year UN Programme on African Economic Recovery. "How can we not respond to something that has killed 25 million people and has 40 million more in its grip?"

Lewis witnessed the devastation of AIDS firsthand as a UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa from 2001 to 2006. He wrote the 2005 international bestseller, *Race Against Time: Searching for Hope in AIDS-ravaged Africa*. "I never imagined what I would encounter," he said of his time in Africa. "Nothing prepared me for what I witnessed with the pandemic. And the overriding reality has been the ominous presence of death."

According to Lewis, the ravages of the diseases are more than the millions of lives lost, but the toll it is taking on the future of Africa. "If you lose so many people in the productive ages of 15 to 49—your doctors, your nurses, your teachers, your farmers—then you put your whole country's integrity in peril," he said.

The loss creates an even larger gap in medical care. Lewis pointed out that sub-Saharan Africa has 11 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of the world's HIV/AIDS cases, and only 3 percent of the world's health workforce. "In the United States there is one doctor for every 300 people," said Lewis. "In Mozambique, there is one doctor for every 33,000 people." He pointed out children and women are taking the brunt of the disease.

Efforts have been made to get needed medical help and supplies to Africa. Lewis hopes the help will continue from organizations such as Doctors Without Borders and Partners in Health. Advances for vaccines and other medicines are coming, but slowly. "A possible cure could be 10 years away," he said, "and that is sad news for so many who are dying so quickly."

There is hope, said Lewis. "When one part of the human family is under siege, then another part responds." He encouraged students in the audience to become involved and support organizations such as CARE, which send help to AIDS-torn countries. "Answers must come from a decent and compassionate commitment from governments," said Lewis. "And when that does not come through, it is up to the public, the citizens of countries to respond. If the Western world responds, we can turn back the results of this pandemic," he said.

*Lewis, who was leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party for eight years, is co-chair the Leadership Programme Committee for the 17th International AIDS Conference. He was a Commissioner for the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, a Senior Advisor for Health and Human Rights to the Harvard School of Public Health and a member of the Board of Directors of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. He is also the chairman of the board of his Stephen Lewis Foundation, which provides resources to small, front-line groups that focus on HIV/AIDS patients, as well as children who have become orphans due to the disease.*

*Lewis' awards include the Maclean's magazine "Canadian of the Year" in 2003, the Pearson Peace Medal from the UN in Canada, which recognizes outstanding achievement in the field of international service and understanding, in 2004 as well as the Jonathan Mann Health and Human Rights Award from the International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care. He is also the recipient of numerous honorary degrees.*



Stephen Lewis