

Speech by Bob Geldof at the launch of the Report of the Commission for Africa, British Museum, London, Friday 11 March 2005

I hate politicians. They always get people to prepare their speeches. This is it. I never feel glad about anything, I always wake up feeling damn, another bad day. I woke up very early, I never get up at 6.00. Tony told me he gets up at 6.00 every day, in fact he hasn't been to bed last night I don't think. And I thought, like the old movies, this is a grand day. I went back to an Irish word my dad uses, I said this is a grand day, this is a great day, this really is a great day for me. I never say that, but it is, because this thing here illuminates me, invigorates me, as much as when I was a kid years ago when I read the Brandt report. Sadly those sorts of things excite me. And this is bolder, as Gordon just said, than the Marshall Plan, it is more practical than Brandt, it is a brave, I think, and again unlike my colleague Bono, I rarely use this word, I genuinely think this is an historic document, and should nothing else happen beyond this room and beyond this morning, some day at the end of this century, in the room behind there in the reading room, someone will pick this out of a shelf and say in 2005 they knew what had to be done, they knew how to do it and they knew why they were doing it. And my great fear is that that person in 2099 will then say, but they didn't. And if we don't, then let the shame be forever on our heads, because this thing here is so doable.

For the last three months I have been in Africa and we were just lining up like kids, what the civil servants do is they say Geldof, Geldof, you are in the front, you are going on first, and there we were, the Prime Minister, and the Chancellor, and the Finance Minister and the UN Secretary, and there we were lining up, with a paddy pop singer in the front, and Gordon and Tony were looking at the TV screen, and what those things you saw were some of the film that I have been shooting in Africa in the last few months, and for those of you who don't think that this stuff is real – get real. Stop the froth of political crap that goes on all the time. This is true rooted reality. And these two guys, political opinions aside, are serious about this as individuals. I am not here to beat them up, I have talked at length and together with them, they are serious, their rhetoric rises, their eyes cease to be dull and leaden and they become animated, and when they watched that screen the Prime Minister asked me what is that, and I explained to him that those walking feet were 40,000 children in northern Uganda, being sent by their mums and dads in from the villages that surround the town of Kitkum every night for 10 years, to escape the thugs that will raid their village and take their children to be sex slaves and child soldiers. Because guns are so small and so light, you can just spray 400 rounds in seconds that will penetrate three brick thick walls.

In our world, last night and tonight, 40,000 children walking up five dust roads to sleep on the rocks and rubble of a deserted town more or less like Kitkum. I don't care how corny I sound, I don't care, it happens. How dare we let that happen. I can be emotive, I don't have to be empirical, and the language of this report is unflinching, it is different to Marshall, it is different to Brandt, it clearly states and redefines the compact, the dysfunctional compact between our world and the world of the poor, and it redefines it in terms of our humanity and not our economic interest.

Are you serious? I couldn't care less about going on Newsnight, and BBC World and talking about the cost of this. I don't care what it costs. I do not want 40,000 children walking up a road every night to escape being killed. But let me tell you what the cost is. Let me tell you how pathetic this is. Let me tell you about all the NGO arguments about the strategies for Gleneagles. Screw Gleneagles. Do you know how much it costs? One half stick of chewing gum for each citizen of the G7 countries – a half stick of chewing gum each a day. No jobs lost, no taxes raised, no farms closed, no factories closed.

What are we doing? What are we doing? This is great, this is great. It asks the question why is one continent in singular decline. Why is it so conditioned to that of poverty, while the rest of the world streaks away from it? Why? Is it the stupidity and brutality of the thugs that still operate governments throughout Africa. Here is the President of Malawi. He has got a guy there who tried to clean up the government, suddenly his party left him. Hello? The President of Uganda who implemented poverty measures, Aids measures that all worked with debt relief, and now he is trying to be President for life. Get a grip Museveni, your time is up, go away. Mugabe – that ageing creep – get out, let Africa breathe. It is stirring, it has been, as the declaration says, a giant asleep in an enforced slumber, but it is stirring. There are freeish and fairish elections, and that is a great start. There are 16 countries with enviable economic growth, from a low base but getting there. This says that, it talks about the systemic pervasive endemic criminality of corruption, and it talks about our disgraceful, disgusting signing up to documents we have no intention of fulfilling.

Is that not an equal corruption, to represent your country, a democratic leader, and to sign up to a document that you know perfectly well you never have to be asked for? This is great. Be under no doubt. Try and read it. Paul Vallely and Nick Stern spent a lot of time writing this, and it is a dream, it reads, it skips along, every kid in the country is going to have a copy of this in their school, we are bloody sure about that.

So you came here for the usual launch and you get me ranting at you. Well too bad. What has to happen now is that all of us leave this room – this is the Band Aid moment - because I don't know what Blair and Brown do besides their gig, and they have gone over their job by committing themselves to this. I don't think they need this politically, I have got to be honest with you, why bother, why put yourself in the noose. And I rang your man in the middle there a year and a half ago, fulminating at him from the middle of Africa, and he told me to shut up and calm down and come and see him when I got back, and I did, and he did this, and Gordon did it, and he asked Trevor to come, and Anna, and all those people, and Tushtan here who is a brilliant man. These aren't stupid people; they gave really serious amounts of time. I know you think because you have never done it, I have never done it, and you know it would all be crap as well, but it actually isn't. And you can arrive with conclusions, you can buy-in and push the agenda and process, and that is what we have to do today. You can either say I will be cynical and not go along with this, or you can say 2005, that is the day we had the answer and

the day that the change began. Today we either have the balls to leave the British Museum and go out and try and do this. Why not? Why not? It is so deep in its analysis that it provides maybe not the answer, but part of the way to the answer. And so outside of politics, all of the activists here, leave here now, go from here now and prepare for that long walk to Gleneagles, just like Tony and Gordon have to prepare to ring up George and say do this, do this one George, if anything do this for me, give me this one, it is going to cost you so little, do it for me.

Do you know what the debt is for America? \$150 – 200 million a year. 300 individuals can write that cheque in America. Do you know what African world trade is? 2% of world trade. What do we care about tariffs and subsidies? How dare we ask them to open their markets. We say we are in a free trade society. Adam Smith is clear in the Wealth of Nations, he says infant economies must be protected. You are a free trader, read the bible.

Aid, double aid, they would still be receiving less aid than any continent. Half a stick of gum here. What do you want? Can I keep the other half? Yes. So go now. The politicians and the activists and those outside of politics, not just the long march to Gleneagles, but finally, hopefully, with this today, if I can paraphrase Nelson, finally the long walk to justice. That would be good.