

September 21, 2007

Frank P. Incropera
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365 Fitzpatrick Hall
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Frank,

I write to request that you serve on a newly created Task Force on Africa. The Task Force will be chaired by Professor Lawrence Sullivan. As soon as the complete membership of the Task Force is known, I will send you the names and contact information on all members.

One of the greatest shifts in perspective brought about by the advances of the twentieth century was the common awareness that we must think globally. This is now widely regarded to be a presupposition in most areas of human concern, including politics, economics, health care and medicine, the environment, and religion. The University of Notre Dame houses one of the leading centers for the study of democracy throughout the world, focusing on Latin America, the Kellogg Institute. Significant additional faculty resources are devoted to educational and research activities regarding South America as well. Similarly, we have an expanding center devoted to the study of Europe, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, and significant additional faculty resources are available to explore matters relating to Europe. Last year significant attention was given to expanding the University's Asian studies efforts. Aided by several major donations, the University has committed to expanding its programs about, with, and in Asia. However, the University has not focused as extensively on other regions, including Africa, as topics of study.

There are many reasons why Notre Dame should carefully assess whether Africa should become an area of focus. Some of the world's most pressing issues are evident in clear and unambiguous ways in Africa. The prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Africa—Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for roughly one-third of the deaths related to HIV/AIDS, and an estimated 90 million people in Africa will be infected—underscores the need to expand medical research and care. The continent of Africa is home to some of the poorest economies in the world. One of the predicted effects of global warming is the additional loss of moisture in areas of the world like Africa that can not afford to lose more water. At the same time that it faces these challenges, Africa is becoming increasingly important to Christianity, as the southern hemisphere is displacing the northern hemisphere as the worldwide locus for the Christian faith. Such matters give rise to numerous questions that are ripe for study in fields as diverse as science, law, theology, sociology, engineering, and economics. Such matters also demand action.

Africa has suffered the ravages of the major movements that mark the modern and postmodern world: colonization and decolonization, the exploitation of raw materials in the global economy, the competing alignments and surrogate conflicts of the Cold War, the depletion of intellectual capital through immigration, the widening disparity of resources for

healthcare, education, technology, and wealth under the divisive dynamics of globalization. African peoples stand as special witnesses to the very forces – material, economic, socio-political, and spiritual – which shape our world and which, in the University we seek to understand. Understanding the reality of Africa and learning from the experience of Africa’s diverse peoples, therefore, can play a key role in accomplishing the mission of our University: to know our world to the best of our abilities and thus prepare our students to take their creative places in it.

The University of Notre Dame already has a number of ties with Africa. We were the second university, after Columbia, to embrace the Millennium Project, in which we are participating through the Notre Dame Millennium Development Initiative. The Congregation of Holy Cross has a long history in East Africa, especially in Kenya and Uganda. The University has developed a program for international study at Kampala, Uganda, in connection with Kamperere University, the leading university of Uganda. Notre Dame has been intimately connected with the U.S. Bishops’ “A Call to Solidarity with Africa.” Following its 2001 release, Notre Dame sponsored a major conference about the document, one part of which occurred on our campus and the other part of which occurred in Nigeria. Similarly the Kroc Institute held a conference in Jinja, Uganda in 2004 entitled “Religions in African Conflicts and Peacebuilding Initiatives.” The College of Arts and Letters recently established the Department of Africana Studies and has made it a priority in the current campaign. The Department of Theology has developed a plan to bring graduate students from Africa, especially Nigeria, to our doctoral program in Theology to prepare them to return to professorial posts in Africa. The College of Engineering, in collaboration with the Universite d’Abomey-Calavi, is actively involved in the study of water quality in villages in Africa. Mendoza College of Business has a program in Cape Town, South Africa, in which students work with NGOs. These are some but not all of the initiatives currently in place to study issues in Africa.

In light of these considerations, the basic charge to the Task Force is to weigh all relevant factors and recommend whether or not the University should undertake a greater commitment to focus on issues relevant to Africa, articulating clearly the reasons for your recommendation. The major concern of the Task Force should be academic in nature, though service activities may also be considered as they might relate to possible educational and research activities of faculty and students. If the Task Force reaches the conclusion that a greater academic focus on Africa is warranted, it should also propose how the University might achieve this greater focus, prioritizing its recommendations and framing the current and incremental costs involved in the initiative—ideally in stages—and indicating available and prospective resources that might reasonably be turned to in order to underwrite the effort. The Task Force should ask whatever questions it deems relevant to this charge, but among those questions I ask it to include the following:

1. What are our current initiatives in Africa?
2. Are there areas where our existing competencies and the needs in Africa overlap, but where we are currently doing little? If so, why are we doing little? How might faculty in such areas of competence be encouraged to address the needs of Africa? Should faculty in other areas be so encouraged?

3. Are initiatives relating to Africa coordinated or organized in any particular way? Should they be? Are those engaged in efforts relating to Africa aware of others' efforts relating to Africa? What mechanisms exist for bringing together faculty who work on topics concerning Africa? Are there ways for the Congregation of Holy Cross to support collaborative efforts?
4. Are there ways that we can promote interdisciplinary work to advance what we are currently doing?
5. How might Notre Dame, in all its relevant dimensions, best initiate an intense and sustained engagement with Africa so as to advance the mission of the University?

I ask that the Task Force send me its final report no later than October 1, 2008. I stand ready to help the Task Force in any way I can.

Thank you for any consideration you can give to serving on this Task Force. Please let me know if you have any questions about it. I look forward to hearing from you.

Cordially,

Thomas G. Burish
Provost