

Speech by Samuel Assefa, Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States

Worldwide Orphans Foundation Gala

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

What an honor it is to be at this dinner with my dear friend Jane Aronson, one of the worlds most impassioned and articulate children's advocates.

I am accepting this award from the Worldwide Orphans Foundation on behalf of the government of Ethiopia, which shares Jane's commitment to ensuring that all children, including those suffering from life-threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS, have the opportunity to live rich lives filled with childhood pleasures and dreams of a future.

It is gratifying to be here at the epicenter of the worst global financial crisis since the Great Depression, and know that in spite of that, and perhaps because of that, you are committing your precious time and resources to supporting the children of the world. I would like to reassure you that this is more than just a donation. Through your support tonight, you are changing lives and creating miracles thousands of miles away.

At WWO's Family HealthCare Center in Addis, WWO's Country Director, Ethiopia's own Dr. Sophie Mengistu ensures that children orphaned by AIDS, many of whom are infected themselves, are participating in art and music projects while receiving life-saving antiretroviral therapies. Older children, who a decade ago would not have survived because the world lacked the medical knowledge, are learning how to cook healthy foods and developing technical skills that they can use to find a job after graduation. WWO has even started up an orphan's soccer league.

Before coming tonight, I spoke with Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, our Minister of Health, who sends his appreciation for the generous support Ethiopia has received in the pediatric AIDS arena. This assistance has come not only from the U.S. government but from private U.S.-based organizations including the Worldwide Orphans Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clinton Foundation and the International Center for Aids Care and Treatment.

Aided by its international partners, Ethiopia is making huge strides on the public health front. Over the past 15 years, the government has reduced its child mortality rate by 40%, thanks to a national measles immunization campaign and a globally-acclaimed malaria prevention and treatment program. By 2010, the government has committed to providing free antiretroviral

therapy to all citizens who need them. Already, more than 2.5 million people have received free HIV/AIDS services.

By supporting Jane's efforts to enrich the lives of Ethiopian children who have suffered tragic losses, you are helping one of Africa's largest countries build its next generation of teachers, entrepreneurs and leaders.

Thank you, once again, for your generosity and compassion. I look forward to the wonderful evening ahead.