

## Extra Feature Story

### **Bush Visits African Nations on Health Tour**

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**President Bush visited Africa this week to highlight U.S. relief efforts and urge Congress to reauthorize and increase funding for his AIDS initiative.**

The president visited five countries – all relatively stable democracies that receive substantial U.S. aid: Benin, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana and Liberia.

#### **Bush's Africa initiatives**

President Bush was greeted enthusiastically each place he went. Dancers in Tanzania wore outfits decorated with his face. Thousands of schoolchildren in Ghana waved flags as his car passed.

Bush's popularity on the continent is due, in large part, to humanitarian and development policies championed by his administration.

The best-known of these policies is the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. PEPFAR, launched in 2003, has invested \$15 billion over five years, making it the largest investment to fight a single disease in history. Bush also introduced the President's Malaria Initiative in 2005 to combat the mosquito-borne disease in Africa.

The Bush administration also promoted the Millennium Challenge Accounts, which grants humanitarian aid to countries who sign compacts promising to make political and economic reforms.

Steven Radelet, an expert on African development, described the program as "an imaginative and creative new way to think about foreign assistance," to the Council on Foreign Relations.

#### **First stop, Benin**

The president first touched down in Benin, a tiny country in Western Africa that has been a stable democracy since 1990 and is one of the continent's largest cotton producers.

Poverty, however, remains a major problem in the country: Almost 38 percent of its population lives below the poverty line.

The United States is helping fund initiatives there to improve the country's infrastructure and attract foreign investment. Benin is also part of the President's Malaria Initiative.

#### **Tanzania**

Tanzania, located in East Africa, faces high HIV infection rates – approximately 7 percent of its population is HIV-positive. The country benefits from PEPFAR and Malaria Initiative money. Vouchers for 2 million mosquito nets have been handed out in the country.

During his visit to Tanzania, the president visited health facilities to see the results of those programs and met with Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete to sign a Millennium Challenge Compact worth almost \$700 million.

#### **Rwanda**

Rwanda is a tiny landlocked country in central Africa. In 1994, a brutal campaign of genocide left an estimated 800,000 people dead. Rwanda is now trying to promote reconciliation and expand its economy.

The country also receives extensive foreign aid from the United States for HIV/AIDS and malaria.

### **Ghana**

Ghana was the first African country to gain independence from European colonial powers in 1957, but it did not have a successful democratic transition between presidents until 2000. The country's economy is diverse and growing, especially thanks to the discovery of offshore oil in 2006.

Among other projects, the United States has rewarded Ghana with teacher-training funding to strengthen the country's free and mandatory primary and secondary education system.

### **Liberia**

Liberia, located in West Africa, was formed in 1820 by freed slaves and African-Americans from the United States. The country was plagued by civil war from 1989 to 1996, followed by the brutal leadership of President Charles Taylor until 2003. Liberia's current president is now trying to rebuild the country.

President Bush called for Taylor's resignation, and a popular song in Liberia has a chorus that proclaims: "Thank God for George Bush!"

### **Africa's most troubled regions**

Bush's trip did not include visits to Africa's more crisis-plagued countries, such as Sudan, Somalia, or Zimbabwe. He did, however, speak about conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan during his stop in Rwanda. He urged other nations to join with Rwandan President Paul Kagame and "help us get this problem solved once and for all."

While some criticized the president for not visiting countries in trouble, others applauded his efforts to combat disease and poverty. U2 singer and activist Bono said last week, "President Bush has every reason to be proud of what he and so many others have accomplished in Africa," reported the Wall Street Journal.

**-- Compiled by Melanie Mason for NewsHour Extra**

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