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April 11, 2008

### Recent Success Point Out New Opportunities for Global Philanthropy

By Caroline Preston

Redwood City, Calif.

Philanthropy can play a critical role in preventing violence and promoting human rights around the globe, speakers said at a conference here this week.

While donors may be hesitant to support efforts that seek to end conflict and abuse because of the vastness of such problems, solutions do exist to halting human-rights abuses, said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, in New York.

“This isn’t rocket science,” he said. A strong network of local and international human-rights advocacy organizations “can be extremely powerful in forcing governments to respect the rights of people.”

Mr. Roth spoke at the Global Philanthropy Forum, an annual meeting designed to help donors identify effective ways to support international causes. This year’s conference, the seventh, focused on security, human rights, and the responsibility of governments to protect citizens from mass atrocities.

Mr. Roth said his organization and other human-rights advocacy groups have been successful in persuading dictators



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and warlords to respect rights. He cited the role that Human Rights Watch played in helping to force the Nigerian government to extradite former Liberian president Charles Taylor, and in cracking down on the financing and recruitment of child soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a rebel group in Sri Lanka.

His organization achieved such results, he said, by helping to make financial aid and international goodwill conditional on changes in dictators' behavior, and by shining a spotlight on governments that commit abuses.

"We give them a big PR problem that they recognize over time will not be solved unless they change their practices," he said.

### **Rebuilding Societies**

In addition to halting human-rights abuses, the charitable world can help countries heal after conflicts, said Paul van Zyl, executive vice president of the International Center for Transitional Justice, in New York.

Mr. van Zyl's organization has worked in 30 post-conflict countries to promote reconciliation and justice. Its employees help governments and nonprofit leaders learn from places such as East Timor, Sierra Leone, Peru, and other countries that have recovered from violence to devise policies that bring perpetrators to justice and provide information and reparations to victims.

His organization also helps to develop local human-rights leaders, with the aim of staving off future atrocities.

"If you don't deal with past atrocities, it comes back to haunt you and it does so in terms of its own choosing and in ways that are far more destructive than you could possibly imagine," he said. "We have to change the structure of societies in which we work to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Several speakers at the conference said the example of Kenya, where violence that broke out after a disputed election in December has calmed, showed the increasing sophistication of governments, international groups, and nonprofit organizations to respond to crises.

"A decade or two ago, a contested election resulting in an eruption of violence would have taken an awfully long time to permeate into the wider world's consciousness," said Gareth Evans, president of the International Crisis Group, in Brussels. "But there was an extraordinary reaction within 24

and 48 hours.”

Helene D. Gayle, president of CARE, in Atlanta, stressed that calming the fighting in Kenya isn't tantamount to resolving long-standing tensions that fueled the violence. She said philanthropy has a responsibility to deal with the ethnic strife that contributed to the post-election fighting.

“We have to take care of disease, access to water, and basic services, but beyond that look at what will it take to heal some of the tensions that were there to begin with,” she said.

### **Role of Women**

Other speakers said that philanthropy can build peace by elevating the voices of women. Zainab Salbi, founder of the charity Women for Women International, in Washington, said that women in war-torn countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are sidelined from conversations about conflict within their nations.

“You can't build strong nations without having strong women in it,” she said.

Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland, said that causes benefiting women specifically are “the most under funded of all the activities in the world.” Just \$100-million goes to women's organizations and causes worldwide each year, she said.

Creating economic opportunity is also a key to promoting security, speakers said. But philanthropy isn't taking advantage of all of the means at its disposal to fight poverty and unemployment, said Larry Brilliant, executive director of Google.org.

Mr. Brilliant said that foundations and universities should consider investing their endowments in small- and medium-sized businesses overseas. Corporate and charitable leaders need to find ways to reduce transaction costs and other barriers that dissuade people from making such investments.

“Tens of trillions of dollars is sitting on the sidelines,” he said. “If that money was invested in Africa and India to fund small job-creating companies, then unemployment would plummet and the hopelessness would give rise to hope.”

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