

AABWA-USA APPLAUDS RECENT APPOINTMENT OF ELIZABETH MATAKA AS UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPECIAL ENVOY FOR AIDS IN AFRICA

AABWA-USA applauds the recent appointment of Elizabeth Mataka as United Nation Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's new Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa. Elizabeth Mataka is the first African to be appointed as a Special Envoy. She is the first woman to be appointed at so high a level to respond to the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. She is also the first national of Botswana to be called to such an elevated post, and the first individual to move directly from civil society to such an esteemed and responsible position.

This appointment is a singular honor for Africa in general and Botswana in particular. But more importantly than this honor, the appointment signals the Secretary-General's commitment to making AIDS a system wide priority for the United Nations. Many in Africa hope that the appointment of Elizabeth Mataka is one indication that there is a heightened concern to keep the AIDS pandemic a high priority on the global and UN agendas.

That the new Ambassador is from Africa marks real progress in responding to HIV/AIDS. For more than a decade, a cardinal principle of the response has been the greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS also know as "GIPA". The appointment of a person from Botswana suggests the introduction of a new principle – the "GICA" principle which signifies is a greater involvement of countries living with HIV and AIDS. Hopefully, this will be the catalyst for a movement that will see HIV/AIDS-related policies and actions originating - not in Geneva, Washington, Paris, New York, London or to other northern capitals - but instead within those countries that are reeling under the impacts of the AIDS pandemic and that know from their daily experience just what it means to live with this serious health crisis.

Elizabeth Mataka's work will be lightened because she has been part and parcel of the civil society response for so many years. She knows from her own personal experience the extent of this response and is singularly well placed to promote it even further. Having headed an organization (the Zambia National AIDS Network (ZNAN)) that channels Global Fund resources to civil society entities in Zambia, she knows what these bodies can do. She also understands the significance of funding in forwarding their work in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support. The integrity, effectiveness and efficiency of ZNAN will greatly support her efforts to do even more in promoting the civil society response and encouraging a more harmonious and synergetic relationship between civil society and governments.

AABWA-USA believes that this is a great appointment of a woman of substance, experience and commitment. Many people in African countries, especially women and children that are ravaged by HIV/AIDS see it as a bright light shining a beacon of hope into the darkness of the AIDS pandemic.