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By the NewsMax.com Staff

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Friday, July 14, 2006 12:39 a.m. EDT

Bill Clinton Urges Africa on AIDS Testing

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton on Friday urged African governments to encourage people to take voluntary AIDS tests, saying it was the only way that newly available drugs would have an impact on the epidemic.

"People living with HIV and AIDS can live a normal life if they go for testing to know their status. We'll bring the medicine and it does not matter at what cost but how many lives will be saved and changed," Clinton said.

AIDS kills 10 people in Malawi per hour, and at least one million of the small southern African country's total population of 12 million is infected, according to official statistics.

Clinton's foundation has been working to make cheaper anti-retroviral (ARV) AIDS drugs available in Africa, and he has in the past voiced support for mandatory HIV/AIDS tests in countries with high infection rates.

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Mandatory testing remains controversial, with some activists fearing it could expose infected people to stigma particularly in countries where treatment is not readily available.

Clinton's visit to Malawi was to unveil new projects undertaken by the Clinton-Hunter Foundation Development Initiative, which aims to address poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

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Clinton commended Malawi - one of Africa's poorest and least developed nations - for its anti-poverty agenda.

"You have set the right priorities. We have come here to build a partnership with poor people to help them help themselves. I promise you that together we'll keep the score," he said.

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The CHDI has set aside an initial \$100 million for Malawi and Rwanda.

The first projects under the Clinton-Hunter initiative will invest in education, health, infrastructure, agriculture, and entrepreneurial support.

"This is a private sector initiative by two individuals who are touched by poverty in Malawi and are committed to assist in alleviating in," Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika said at Friday's ceremony.

Tom Hunter, a Scottish philanthropist and retail magnate has staked \$100 million on the initiative. He is ranked by Forbes Magazine as the 548th richest person in the world.

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