

**Books For Africa's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Program**  
**September 12, 2008**

**Speech by Congressman Keith Ellison (MN)**

One of the many reasons that I love our state of Minnesota is that we are a collection of people who understand how very small the world is. We understand that we are a global village, that we all rely on each other, that all we need each other, and that we have to reach out and do mutually beneficial things to help enhance the lives of us all.

So, congratulations on your 20th year, Tom. This is a tremendous occasion, and I'm so honored to be part of it.

But I'm particularly proud to join with Secretary-General Kofi Annan in announcing the Jack Mason Law & Democracy Initiative. As you know, the ingredients of democracy are manyfold. One of them must be information, and that depends upon the rule of law. By providing books to law libraries, to law schools, to legislative bodies, and to other institutions that help carry out and instill the rule of law, what we're doing is helping to build stable societies in which people can grow and prosper economically.

You know, you never know where the lightning is going to strike. The answer to cancer might be locked up in the mind of a child in Juja, Kenya. It might be locked up in the mind of a child in St. Paul. But with a continent as vast as Africa, I know that so many answers to the problems vexing the world are locked up in the minds of people who just need an opportunity to let it all come on out.

So, thank you all very much for this initiative. It's critical. Jack Mason, as you know, was a wonderful magistrate. I appeared in front of him many times. He was a stickler for being on time. And I want you to know that it's great that we would honor him by having this program in his honor.

Co-chairs of the program, as you know, are Kofi Annan and Walter Mondale, and we have a distinguished board all around. And again, special thanks to West Publishing for partnering in their strong commitment and donating the newest textbooks and treatises on the breadth of human rights and subjects.

But let me just say that this project is going to be launched in very short order, and just next week 1,500 law books are going to Monrovia, Liberia. So they're getting started right away. This is not some long-term thing; this is happening right now. So I'm glad that we're all here to be part of it, and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part announcing it.

I did go, as part of a commission called the House Democracy Assistance Commission in the United States Congress. The purpose of this commission is to partner with fledgling democracies, democracies that are present, that are growing, but that need a country that has 200 years of democratic rule to partner with so that they can grow and strengthen their own democracy in their own way. So, the House Democracy Assistance Commission—HDAC is what we call it—we went on a congressional delegation to five African countries in July. We visited Liberia. We visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We visited Malawi, and I just met a friend from Lilongwe who's here, and that's great to see him. There he is over there. And also Kenya, and then we went to Nouakchatt, Mauritania.

In every country, you all, through your tremendous advocacy, allowed me to carry a box of books from Books For Africa and hand them off at every country that we visited. In Kenya, we were in a small village

and the students had a wonderful school. They were eager to learn. They had motivated teachers, but they didn't have any books in the school. They had no library. And so, imagine how proud I was to open up this box of shiny new encyclopedias and dictionaries from Books For Africa. They want more of your books. They can't wait. They can't enough of these books, and so I hope that you will continue this project.

But I also hope that you will continue to understand that those children depend on a stable society in which a person who has a legal dispute can go to a court and can have a fair hearing there, that a person who has an unpopular opinion would be able to have a fair hearing and have their rights protected for free expression. And that a person who is accused of violating the law would have somebody in the judiciary who can rely on some precedent and some law books that they would derive that precedent from in order to have a fair, stable society.

Democracy is not just about elections; it's more about what happens in between those elections. And so Books For Africa, with this supply of law books and treatises to the institutions that make the rule of law possible, is helping to make a stable society for those children who are going to read those books.

So thank you all. Thank you all very much. I'm your friend. I'm committed to you. Take care.