

Keynote Speech for McKelvie Middle School

“Never underestimate what a single teenager can accomplish”

(Monday, June 13, 2005)

I am here today to talk to you about service and leadership, but first I want to express condolences on recent loss of student John Ho Sang. As I understand, John was a 13 year-old Boy Scout Troop member before his life was cut short by the car accident. However, let us take lessons from this young man as well as another young person from your school, Ms. Chiara Arcidy, about the importance of service and leadership. I want you to realize that what matters is not what you have, but what you do with what you're given.

Now I'll be honest with you. I was not always a leader. Actually when I was young I was a naughty, naughty boy. Though I am a prince and I was born into a comfortable lifestyle, I was like most teenagers. I went through a rebellious phase of partying and getting into trouble. It all came to an end though when I began smoking. Somehow I got hooked, but my Mom was very strict and wouldn't allow it. I thought I was smart and always hid it very well –or so I thought. One day, my mother was in my room and I bet down to pick something up when my pack of cigarettes fell out of my shirt pocket. I was in trouble. As a result and my behavior I was sent out of the house to live in the poor countryside with a relative. I wouldn't have all of the luxuries or even basic things for an entire year. However, in that year my life changed – for the best.

I saw first-hand the poverty that so many people lived with and it determined me to want to spend my life providing opportunities for those people. My first opportunity to do this came when U.S. President Bill Clinton came to South Africa to visit my grandfather. I met President Clinton's nephew, Justin, and we became good friends. Here in the U.S. a new program called America Reads had began and we decided to bring something like that to South Africa. So we established America reads South Africa Reads (*ARSAR*), a non-profit organization that promotes literacy. I ended traveling across the United States speaking to students about your age about illiteracy and conducting book drives. As a result we were able to raise over 100,000 books for libraries serving poor rural schools in South Africa.

Later, after learning about the Millennium Development Goals I became involved in the effort to achieve them, especially for Africa. We want to end poverty and disease and illiteracy and give all people a chance. So that one experience changed my whole outlook on life and mobilized me for action.

I tell you this to express to you that any greatness is not in my title as **prince**, but in my service as a **leader**, an activist, and a humanitarian. God determines your greatness by how many people you serve, not how many serve you.

What does this have to do with you? Well, young people such as yourselves are important. One young person can change the world: full of ideas, energy, and optimism. Young people have the right to participate fully in society and to express their opinions about matters related to their lives. Participation by young people is an investment in a country's future. They can hold governments accountable for current policies and promises that have implications for the future. What can you do? You can volunteer, looking for groups to join or starting your own group, or you can become an advocate like me.

You have a great example of a single teen who is making the world a better place, Chiara Arcidy. Chiara, an alumna of McKelvie, is the founder of non-profit organization, HELP-U.org, a student-run volunteer organization comprised of college and high school students trying to help various environmental, social, and educational issues. Chiara is only 16 years old, but she is changing the world. Her group will be donating to an orphanage my family runs in South Africa. So, in essence she is fighting poverty and helping those hurt by HIV/AIDS at just 16. Chiara was inspired by **Maris Sidenstecker**, who founded the Save-The-Whales organization 30 years ago, when she was only 14 years old.

In conclusion, how you treat other people, not your wealth or accomplishments, is the most enduring impact you can leave on earth. You don't have to be an adult to make a difference either. Each of you can make a difference. I leave you with this quote from an inspiring young person, Chiara, "*Never underestimate what a single determined teenager can accomplish!*"