

July 24, 2005

Hi everyone,

Remember that story that Carol wrote about me saying that I lead a "somewhat bland" life here in Zanzibar? Well – I wonder what an exciting life would look like! Former President Bill Clinton visited last Thursday and it was a great success on all accounts – let me tell you about it. He came to Zanzibar, met the president at the State House, toured the HIV clinic, visited ZAPHA+ then did a CNN interview in our courtyard. The CNN interview will be shown in a seven segment series at the end of August and then an hour long show about Clinton and Africa (I don't know exactly what the focus will be)

As I have told you ARVs (antir-retroviral drugs) were not available here in Zanzibar which meant that if someone tested positive for HIV it was a death sentence. Therefore, most people never tested because why bother when there was not treatment available – so even though they report that the prevalence rate is very low for Zanzibar I have to question that. Most of the people here in Zanzibar know someone who has been affected or died of AIDS. The government had been in the process of acquiring the ARVs and setting up the health care infrastructure so that they could effectively treat everyone but it was going to be at least a year before that would begin and many people were dying. The Clinton Foundation came to Zanzibar in early February and started working closely with the Ministry of Health to bring ARVs here. The first ARVs were distributed on Thursday, March 24, 2005 and it was a great day!!!! Before then my group alone was losing 5 to 8 people a month to the disease and the ARVs have given people a chance to stay alive and live a productive life. And President Clinton is also pushing hard to get children on ARVs – this is an issue because the dosing is different – maybe even the medication is different I don't really know (I'm not an expert on the medical end). Of our 87 members we now have 28 adults on ARVs and 4 or 5 children – that's a lot of lives that are being saved. And there are many other PLHAs (people living with HIV/AIDS) here in Zanzibar who are not members of ZAPHA+ who are being treated.

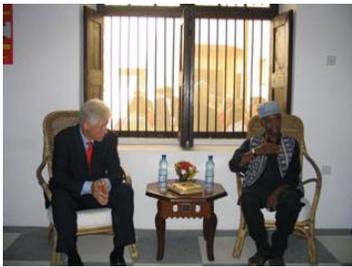
Now, my main focus for this trip was to try to get Clinton to tell our members that they can come to him if the government ever starts charging money for the ARVs. Right now they are free and that is key because certainly my people are too poor to afford them – many of my people are starving because they don't have enough money for food and they have been too sick to work. Sandra, the country director for Clinton Foundation, visited ZAPHA+ after the ARVs began and Abdallai, one of our members, told her how grateful they all were for the chance to live but they were frightened because all donors always go away and they are then left to deal with the government by themselves. You see, most donors come in, give money, set up programs then leave – there is a large turnover of development people who come to work in Africa so you can never depend on the person who is helping you today to be here tomorrow. And Abdallai rightly said that if the government ever starts charging money for the ARVs, then many people won't be able to afford them and they will die because once you start taking ARVs you can never stop taking them because the disease progresses quickly then.

So as immensely grateful as we all are for the chance to have the ARVS everyone is absolutely terrified because they know that in reality they are pretty powerless over their own fate when it comes to international aid. I have to tell you that I'm feeling that myself – I'm realizing how much I have to go and beg for money and help for ZAPHA+ and that the donors can put any restrictions they want on the grants and take them away at any time. Now, most of you know how much I hate not being in control and having to depend on anyone for anything. I realized last week that as a white, educated American woman, I have the ability to work and provide for myself at any time but for many of these people who are uneducated and poor they have no recourse but to depend on others. Yuck!!!! More than anything they want to become strong and self-sufficient so that they can take care of themselves – to do that they need training, guidance and lots of positive reinforcement and help. I am in awe of the resilience and strength of the people I have met here – we all have so much to learn from them.

Okay – enough of me being on my soapbox (you know I can go on forever) – here are some of the photos that I took of the momentous day.



Here is the CNN set with Farouque sitting in the Clinton chair – Sabrina and I decorated the set – it looks pretty cool – you know how much I love to play Martha Stewart! And here is the group photo of Farouque, me, Heidi, Clinton and Nadine. And here is Consalata, our mwenye kiti, asking Clinton a question. Doesn't she look so beautiful? Man was she good – I can't remember everything that she said but she thanked him for the ARVs and also thanked Heidi for respecting our members whenever they go to the clinic and then she asked him for help to keep the ARVs free. I was also able to spend 10 minutes with him later on and I did my passionate pitch telling him what is going on here. He told the group that he would help – he also mentioned it publicly in his press conference after he toured the clinic. Do you know that he started all of this 2-1/2 years ago? It's amazing how much he has accomplished so quickly – he is truly a great man who is making a difference to so many around the world.



Here is Clinton listening while Farouque translates – I had requested that Clinton meet with the members privately – without any cameras or a lot of people because stigma is a huge issue here. During World AIDS day one of our members received a plaque from President Karume, it was in the papers, and her family kicked her and her son out the next day. Most people don't tell ANYONE of their status because they and their children will be shunned or they can lose their jobs if they are working and there are no laws in place to protect them. That's my next project – to get the government to make it safe for people to go public – they expect people to be brave and speak out but why should they take on all the responsibility for that when the consequences can be so devastating? I think that may be quite a fight but at least I won't be bored right? And here is President Clinton shaking hands with EACH of the members – it was incredible watching that. For many people they felt that they were blessed because he touched them and they refused to wash until they could go home and touch their children or other loved ones to pass on the blessing and good fortune that he bestowed on them by touching them. And here he is with the children – he was really enjoying himself and it was wonderful to watch. Sandra asked if I would let some journalists in – there were two reporters, one from Esquire Magazine and one from New York Magazine and Dr Sanjay Gupta from CNN (he was doing the Clinton interview). I did let them in to watch but not to film or take photos – the members needed to trust that they wouldn't be filmed and have it shown anywhere in Zanzibar. The Minister of Health tried to get into the room at first and Heidi (yeah Heidi) told him that it was a private meeting and he would have to wait outside with the others – you can see people who stood outside the window listening in. We weren't trying to be disrespectful but it wasn't about making others happy – it was about the members being able to thank President Clinton and to spend a little time with the man who has given them a second chance at life. I spoke with Consalata yesterday and she said that now that President Clinton has shown that the members of ZAPHA+ are important the government will have to listen to us. She is such a strong woman and a great leader for these people.

Tausi is sitting in front of Clinton in the white T shirt – I wish I had a better photo of the two of them. She's 27 and has a 6 year old – she is on ARVs but her son is HIV negative (thank god). Her husband kicked her out after she tested positive (the odds are he infected her – this happens all the time) but she is a strong woman. She is an actress and has been one of our only members who is willing to go public – she is often on TV and radio and performs in a play about HIV/AIDS. The day Clinton came was a festival day (don't know the name of it) and Tausi was performing there – she was great and stayed in town to meet Clinton then Farouque got a taxi to take her and the others up to where the festival was. Farouque stayed for a little while and watched Tausi get up on the stage in front of a hundred or so people, stand up straight (she has great presence for a small woman) and say "I'm HIV+ and who of you would dare to shake my hand?" (people think you get AIDS just by touching someone who's positive) There were boos and jeers and then she said "Well, I just spent half an hour talking with President Bill Clinton and he wasn't afraid to shake my hand". Farouque said that the crowd went crazy. I also spoke with a Zanzibari friend yesterday who said that everyone in town is talking and he said that there are many educated

and wealthy people who are afraid to go public – he was wondering if they could also join ZAPHA+ even if they weren't poor and uneducated. I don't know if President Clinton understands the impact that he has on people – he has started dialogue that can have far reaching consequences and by showing that the members of ZAPHA+ can be recognized as strong people he is helping so many others. Wow

Okay – so then he went back to the hotel and rested and they asked me later to take him shopping through Stonetown. I had spent four days with the advance team (who I call my puppies) – they are wonderful young men in their late 20's and early 30's and they remind me SO much of my boys and their friends. I can't figure out which part of all of this experience was the best for me but these men gave me so much – we had dinners together and they hung out at my place and we talked and talked and I took them shopping (I walked miles) and so they asked me to guide Clinton on the route through the small alley like streets in Stonetown. Here are the photos



Here is Heidi and me with the puppies – we went snorkeling and to Prison Island one day – the guys work hard and play hard – they sure do have lots of energy – I almost forgot what it was like to be around young guys. I miss my boys so much at times and this was a great joy for me to be able to spend time with them. I was wondering at first if Clinton would be a nice man and realized that he must be if he has such great guys working for him – and yes he turned out to be a kind and wonderful man. Here he is shopping at my friend Shebly's place – Shebly was at the mosque praying and missed him but I got a lot of great shots to give to him. And here Clinton posed with Felix, Anita and Rahim at my internet café – I have sent pictures of them before. It was so cool the way that he would stop and pose with people and he definitely helped the local economy that day – wow – he spent lots of money which was great for everyone. I am going to make copies of photos to give out to people – they are so thrilled that they'll be able to put in in their shops and prove that they really met Clinton.



Here President Clinton is choosing jewelry for Chelsea and Hillary – he spent half an hour in Izdi's shop!!! Nadine lives with Izdi's family and it was a great honor that he went there – usually Izdi doesn't like to have her photo taken at all but she was willing that day!!! Here's a shot of some of the crowds who came to see him and shake his hand (and there are some of the puppies carrying the goodies he bought)– it was a little overwhelming in this particular area but then we turned the corner and it was much better. And here he is greeting some young Muslim boys with the Catholic church in the background – I thought it was a cool shot. Many of the people had no idea who he was which was also very refreshing. It was nice that Clinton didn't bring a large entourage or photographers with him – just some of his advance team and security.

I talked to many people yesterday and the day before and the reactions were great. The people were in awe that he would actually walk amongst them and shake their hands – they said that IF they ever did get anywhere close to President Mkapa (president of Tanzania) or Karume (president of Zanzibar) they would NEVER be allowed to actually touch them. Some told me that by walking through town he showed the world that Zanzibaris were people to be trusted and that he didn't have to be afraid of Muslims. You see, Laura Bush had visited the week before but she had tons and tons of security around her and only spent time here in Zanzibar with the president, his wife and some ministers. She did go to a school to donate some money but it was well staged and the people were unhappy that she didn't feel they were important enough for her to greet any of them.

Okay – that's enough guys – oh a few more things. I got a job as a part time consultant for CHAI (Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative) so I get enough money to live here and I will have health insurance!!!! I know that many of you have been worried that I was going to starve or something but don't worry – I'll be just fine now. Yesterday a friend of mine told me of a friend of his who is going on safari next week and they need an extra person so I'm going on a four day lodge safari for \$500 (great price!!!). How about that!!!! I leave on Tuesday and will be back on Friday so if you don't hear from me that's why.

This is so totally cool – I knew that my life would change on Thursday and I still have lots to learn about just how it has changed. I am truly the MOST fortunate woman in the world aren't I? And if this is living a somewhat bland life I guess it's okay – actually I wouldn't mind a bit of boredom for a while (oops I better be careful what I ask for).

I miss everyone and look forward to seeing all of you when I visit in September.