



Books For Africa: Voices for Literacy Day  
October 13, 2012  
Remarks from Dikembe Mutombo—Keynote Speaker

Thank you for that warm introduction. Good afternoon ladies, gentlemen, and distinguished guests.

I am truly honored to be here this afternoon to speak to you about Books For Africa. In many African countries, books are scarce so I was delighted to learn that in 2011, Books For Africa shipped 1.9 million books to 21 African countries. I also know that Books For Africa shipped two containers of books to my homeland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and I truly appreciate your efforts.

This is a huge accomplishment because literacy and education around the globe is vitally important. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, **“the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education.”**

As many of you know, I place a tremendous value on education, and speaking here today is a great honor for me. Over the years, I have spoken to hundreds of students in various countries about their academics as well as good sportsmanship.

My father Samuel Mutombo retired after many years as a school superintendent in the Congo. Both of my parents instilled in me the value of an education and a strong work ethic. In the Congo where the average teacher makes \$65.00 per month, education is not free, so I worked in an outdoor market selling fruits and vegetables for no more than \$1.00 per day to earn my school fees. I had to work so hard to pay for my education. An academic scholarship from USAID allowed me to come to America and pursue my undergraduate studies at Georgetown University.

**You never know what direction your life will take or what road you will travel, but your chance of success is certainly greater with an education than without one.**

Each day, one in three children in Africa cannot afford to go to school and 70% of those out of school are girls. From antiquity to this day, women have shown that they are brilliant and formidable leaders.

However, the literacy rate of women, particularly in developing countries, continues to lag behind the literacy rate of men. We know that there are even some countries where girls have to be educated in secret for fear of their lives.

**The education of girls is paramount in the fight against poverty; infant, child, and maternal mortality; and national under-development.**

I am delighted to serve on the board for UNICEF because UNICEF is helping Congolese girls to complete their primary schooling by addressing several of the factors that prevent them from going to school. We know that educating girls for six years or more drastically and consistently improves pre-natal care, postnatal care, and childbirth survival rates.

Educating mothers also greatly cuts the death rate of children under five. An educated mother is more likely to send her children to school.

In 1997, I created the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation whose mission is to improve the health, education, and quality of life for the people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Books For Africa: Voices for Literacy Day  
October 13, 2012  
Remarks from Dikembe Mutombo—Keynote Speaker

Metro Atlanta continues to draw new foreign born residents despite the economic downturn, which sets it apart from many other regions around the country. Atlanta's immigrant population grew by 42,000 people, or 6 percent, from 2007 to 2009. As of 2009, nearly three-quarters of a million foreign born people made the 28-county metro area their home, according to census figures, accounting for 13 percent of the population.

**We can create global relationships right here in Atlanta** because back in 2003, the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation participated in a school-to-school program sponsored by the U.S. government to promote cross-cultural understanding through a mutual exchange of ideas and information. Two educators from the Congo traveled to the U.S. for the teacher exchange at the Otwell Middle School in Forsyth County, GA. The following month, three educators from the Otwell Middle School traveled to the Congo to teach at my old middle school. A computer lab was opened at the school in the Congo and today, nine years later, the students and teachers from both schools still communicate with each other. The Congolese teachers had never been to the U.S. before and the teachers from Cumming had never been to Africa before. Both had unforgettable experiences and we still communicate with them today via Facebook.

At home I encourage my children to read and I have an extensive library as well.

Books For Africa is the world's largest shipper of donated books to Africa and I have visited many of the African countries that Books for Africa has shipped books to. Just last week, I was in Johannesburg, South Africa for the Special Olympics Unity Cup and back in September, I traveled to Kenya and the Sudan with Basketball Without Borders.

In closing, **I would like to commend Books for Africa for putting books in the hands of African children, which will improve their quality of life for a lifetime.**

Thank you and God Bless.