



## Speech to African American Leadership

To the ministers, fellow presenters, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I greet you this morning as a sister of the diaspora, and in the spirit of the ancestors. I greet you this way to call to your remembrance the collective struggle of a people who made bricks from straw, survived the middle passage, and overcame. I wonder if you will join me in singing one of the first songs I remember learning from Vacation Bible School, We Are Soldiers . . . .

We are soldiers in the army.

We have to fight, although we have to cry.

We have to hold up the bloodstained banner.

We have to hold it up until we die.

I greet you in this somewhat unorthodox fashion because I need to get your attention; I need to communicate to you a sense of urgency, and I need to pose a question?

**How can we fulfill the mission God has given us as a people if we are weak, diseased, and unhealthy?**

### **How do we win a war if our soldiers cannot fight?**

- 80% African-Americans in the United States of America who are HIV positive, many of them don't even know it.
- Every 14 seconds a child loses a mom, a dad, or both to AIDS.
- AIDS is the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time.
- It has left 14 million children as orphans, forgotten by the world.
- 63 percent of all women reported with AIDS are African American.
- AIDS is a leading cause of death among black women aged 25--44 years and among black men aged 25--54 years
- Black men are nearly nine times more likely than white men to have AIDS, and black women are 23 times more likely than white women to have AIDS
- In 2002, blacks were approximately 12% of the U.S. population but accounted for >50% of all new HIV diagnoses
- it only takes having sex one time with an infected person to get HIV
- if you've had any kind of sex in the last 10 years, and it was unprotected, you need to get tested for HIV.
- While 50 cent was asking 21 questions, we should have been teaching our teens 21 ways to say no. Black children and youth up to age 19 represent 64% of new HIV cases in the U.S.

I've come this morning to bring you the news that Weapons of Mass Destruction have been found. They are denial, silence, HIV, lack of compassion, AIDS, ignorance, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, cowardice, misplaced priorities, and a lack of understanding. These are the Weapons of Mass Destruction for the Black Community, and if you were counting on George Bush and Condoleeza Rice and Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld to define what's wrong in our community, please wait no longer. That's our job.



## Breaking the Silence - Building Hope

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Here's the critical piece: this disease is preventable. Nobody has to get this disease, and nobody has to die from this disease. Like anything else, it is a choice.

I'm asking you to not only hear me, but also feel me, because the lives of the people sitting in these pews and outside these doors are at stake. I come asking you to join us in this Godly struggle. This is the battle God has given us. When we were children, we sang about being soldiers in the army. An army does not choose its battles. This is our watch. This is our war. This is a battle for the future existence of a healthy Black community. Let's end the stigma

- Get Educated about HIV/AIDS
- Get Tested for HIV/AIDS
- Get honest and get assertive about your relationships
- Preach and pray about HIV/AIDS
- Educate and Equip our community to stop committing suicide.
- Say the seven letters. It won't kill you. In fact, it'll do the opposite.

**We can beat AIDS, but not if we don't put up a fight. Let's Pray.**

**God, Allah, Creator. The almighty, beneficent, and merciful one;**

We come this day acknowledging your power, grace, and mercy, as we pray for the healing of AIDS. We come knowing that many are afraid to even speak the name of HIV and AIDS. We know there are brothers and sisters in the community in need of healing. Lord, we pray that you will touch them in a mighty **way**.

**God**, we pray that the church may embody your spirit of protection and healing. Show us the way to make a difference. Guide our hands to hold the first hand. Open our hearts to receive the first hug. Be a lamp unto our feet as we make our churches, mosques and temples caring and safe places for all your children. Remind us that you have given us this ministry, and we must work to make full proof of it.

**Yahweh Lord**, help us break down walls of separation in our community. Help us build bridges of unity and understanding. Help us break away from phobias, foolishness, and frivolities.

Prepare our hearts as we prepare the way. Encourage us to think the first thought, to make the first sound, to speak the first word, as we break this silence and mend hearts, minds, and spirits.

**Allah, God, Creator.** The almighty, beneficent, and merciful one; make us one with God. Make us one with each other. Makes us one in ministry to the world.

**And the people of God said, AMEN.**