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Dear Head Teacher

SCOTTISH SCHOOLS AFRICA CHALLENGE

I am writing to you about an exciting opportunity to combine learning with some real support for development in Africa.

This year is an important one for Scotland. The annual G8 Summit of leaders from UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States will be held in Gleneagles in July. The UK holds the Presidency and the Summit will focus on how to reduce poverty in Africa and how to tackle climate change.

Both of these are important issues for all Scots, and have a particular resonance with young people. Scotland's links with Africa and its concern for the people of that continent are strong and long-standing. For example there are now links between 152 Scottish schools and counterparts in Africa, ranging from Eritrea to South Africa and from Lagos to Malawi.

I want us to take this opportunity, with the world's focus on Scotland, to build on those links and to think creatively about how Scotland's young people are encouraged to maintain the international outlook we so value. This has to be an outlook that is neither self-serving nor paternalistic; but that recognises the mutual benefits available from working with others to improve the lives of people in less privileged parts of the world.

That is why on 25th February 2005, I will launch the **Scottish Schools Africa Challenge**. I am delighted that the Hunter Foundation are supporting the prize and Tom Hunter will join me to encourage all schools to take part. The details of this joint-funded competition are set out in the attached pack and on our special website www.scottishschoolsafriachallenge.com. This is a national competition open to groups of S1, S2 and S3 pupils in every secondary school in Scotland. The competition encourages your pupils to think about the value of education both in Scotland and Africa and the pack helps to identify sources of information on the connections between them.

In May, I will be visiting Malawi to improve links between Malawi and Scotland and to look at practical ways in which we in Scotland can help to tackle poverty there. As a special and unique prize for this competition, the winning school team will be invited to come with me, for an experience that should be memorable. The involvement of the winning school is an important opportunity to signal commitment by Scotland's youth to communities in Malawi, in Africa as a whole, and across the globe. I urge you and your pupils to take up the **Scottish Schools Africa Challenge**.



JACK McCONNELL