

Bono rallies telecoms in anti-AIDS wave

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Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have taken up the plight of children in Africa as their cause, while George Clooney has banded with his father to boost the profile of the conflict in Darfur to rally international attention. Certainly, Hollywood has embraced the continent as a cause worthy of the media limelight it can bring to it. What's more, celebrities are trying to lure in big companies to help them with their causes, including U2 frontman Bono.

The Irish rocker is no stranger to promoting charitable causes, most notably through his efforts to put Third World debt relief on the agenda of finance ministers from some of the world's richest countries, in addition to politicizing his group's concerts. He has since taken that effort further by taking on the cause of AIDS in Africa, and he has succeeded in getting some of the biggest names in the telecommunications industry to back him up.

On Monday U.S. mobile giant Motorola unveiled a series of cell-phone handsets specifically created to help eliminate the epidemic as part of an initiative launched by Bono earlier this year. Specifically, about \$18 (10 pounds) from sales of the Red MOTOSLVR series that are sold in Britain will be allocated to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, in addition to 5 percent of monthly revenue generated by the sales or use of the Red model.

Bono has succeeded not only in getting Motorola to design a handset to cater specifically to the cause, but he has also gotten telecommunications providers and retailers BT Mobile, Carphone Warehouse, Fresh, O2,

Orange, Tesco Mobile, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone to take part in the campaign and donate part of their earnings from the business the Red series generates to the fund as well.

"Red is a 21st century idea. It's an amazing thing that these companies are doing -- lending their creativity and financial firepower to the Global Fund's fight against AIDS in Africa, the greatest health crisis in 600 years. I think doing the Red thing, doing good, will turn out to be good business for them," Bono said in a news release that announced the companies' commitment.

For their part, the telecommunications groups seem only too happy to be offering their time and money to the cause in light of the benefits they bring and the positive publicity that is generated as a result.

"Motorola has been doing business in Africa for more than 30 years, and our support of the Global Fund is one way that we're able to give back to the region. ... We're literally placing in people's hands an opportunity to help find a solution," said Ron Garriques, president of Motorola's mobile-devices unit.

What's more, telecom companies are not the only private corporations that are happy to work with the singer-turned-activist. On Tuesday Bono acted as guest editor of British daily The Independent, which devoted a good chunk of the day's edition to the plight of AIDS in Africa.

"We need to meet you where you are as you shop, as you phone, as you lead your busy, businessy lives. Those of us who campaign on these issues feel we have made a dent on the pop consciousness with Live Aid and 8, Red Nose Day, Comic Relief and Make Poverty History. But we are still losing the battle: 9,000 new infections every day across the developing world," Bono said in Tuesday's editorial page of the newspaper.

Since the Global Fund was set up in 2002 it has received about \$9 billion in financial commitments through to 2008 and has approved \$5.2 billion in spending on anti-AIDS as well as malaria and tuberculosis projects in more than 130 countries.

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