

***Remarks made by President Obama at the Reception Celebrating the
Signing into Law of AGOA***

July 22, 2015

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome to the White House, everybody.

AUDIENCE: Thank you!

THE PRESIDENT: You all look good.

We have some of America's biggest champions for a strong partnership with Africa here today -- members of the diplomatic corps from our African partners; we've got some outstanding members of Congress, leaders of business, NGOs, members of the faith community.

Ambassador Olhaye -- I want to start by saying that tonight our thoughts are with our friends from Djibouti as we mourn the passing of Ambassador Olhaye. He served here since 1988, the longest-serving foreign ambassador in the United States. He was the dean of the diplomatic corps here and at the United Nations. Michelle and I welcomed him to the White House numerous times. He represented his nation and all of Africa with pride. And the legacy of his service -- particularly his personal role in helping pass AGOA -- is going to endure in the strong partnership between our peoples.

I want to thank everybody who's here for everything that you do to strengthen ties between Africa and the United States. Tonight, I especially want to thank you because, with your help, we succeeded in achieving the long-term renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. That's worth applauding. (Applause.)

So our celebration comes at a perfect moment, because tomorrow, I am going to Africa. (Applause.) I will be going to my father's home country of Kenya, and we will be going to Ethiopia, as well. That's my first visit there, but this is my fourth visit to sub-Saharan Africa, more than any other U.S. President -- which, I guess, if you're name is Barack Obama, I guess that make sense. (Laughter.) I will also have the honor of being the first U.S. President to address the African Union. (Applause.)

My trip, although not long -- because we still got a lot of other business to attend to back here -- reflects a truth that has guided my approach to Africa: Despite its many challenges -- and we have to be clear-eyed about all the challenges that the continent still faces -- Africa is a place of incredible dynamism, some of the fastest-growing markets in the world, extraordinary people, extraordinary resilience. And it has the potential to be the next center of global economic growth.

And that's why, as President, I've worked so hard to take our relationship with Africa to a new level. We've boosted U.S. exports. We've launched historic initiatives to promote trade and investment, health, agricultural development and food security, Power Africa to promote and expand electrification. We're empowering a new generation of young African leaders, including our inspiring Mandela Fellows -- who, when I get back, I'll have a chance to meet with here at the White House for the second class of that outstanding group.

And part of what gives me the most pleasure is the fact that we're able to do this on a bipartisan basis and in partnership with African countries. By the way, to help move these efforts along, we do still need the Senate confirmation of Gayle Smith as our USAID Administrator. (Applause.) Not only is Gayle brilliant and passionate about the issues, and with so many deep, longstanding relationships with people of the continent, but I can always spot her in a crowd because of the hair. (Laughter.) All I had to do was just scan, and then there it was. (Laughter.)

Now that it's been renewed, AGOA will be central to our efforts to boost the trade and investment that supports hundreds of thousands of jobs both in Africa and the United States, creating opportunities for all of us. And I'm especially pleased that AGOA will continue to encourage good governance and labor and human rights. That's something that we can be proud of.

We're going to have to keep on encouraging more American trade and investment in Africa. There's still a lot of misperceptions within the business community. And that's why, last year, the United States hosted its first U.S-Africa Business Forum.

Tonight, I can announce that we will host the next business forum, next year -- and I look forward to working with all of you to help unleash the growth and opportunity that we know Africa is capable of -- (applause) -- progress that delivers more hope and more progress to Africans across the continent, and more jobs and growth here in the United States.

The ties to Africa here in the United States obviously are deep; they are long; they're complicated. There have been times where there have been misunderstandings, and there have been times where there have been suspicions. But when you look at every survey, it turns out that the people of Africa love the United States and what it stands for. Perhaps unmatched on any continent. And what's also interesting about the surveys is, is that when they look to see who are the happiest and most optimistic of people, what's amazing is, is that Africans always rank high, despite poverty, despite conflict. There is a strength and a resilience there.

And the opportunities are extraordinary, and we just have to break down the stereotypes and the barriers. And thanks to the work of all of you -- and I particularly want to thank the members of Congress who are here who have fought so hard for this -- and many of them will be going with me on this Africa trip. (Applause.) I really want to commend them because they're going to help break down those misunderstandings and make things happen. (Applause.)

So thank you very much, everybody. Enjoy the reception. Thank you. (Applause.)

END 6:37 P.M. EDT