



Remarks at AGOA Forum

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Well, thank you, Jendayi, for that wonderful introduction. And I also want to thank you for your extraordinary service in the Administration. Yes, in fact, this President has had a great focus on Africa. He has cared about the issues that affect Africans. He's believed in partnership with Africans. He has believed in the potential of the continent and worked hard to help the continent realize it. But one of the reasons that he's been so focused is that Jendayi is always there, making sure that he is focused. And so I want to thank you for your leadership, too. (Applause.)

Thanks to all gathered here from the other agencies around the government. Especially, I'd like to thank my colleague Susan Schwab. She's been tireless; also in making certain that AGOA works. And to all of you, thank you for joining us. And to my fellow members here on the dais, I am especially proud to have with us Comoran President, Monsieur President Sambi, Cameroonian Prime Minister Inoni, Mauritian Deputy Prime Minister Sithanen, and Kenyan Deputy Prime Minister Kenyatta. Thank you for joining us.

Well, I've been honored to address the AGOA Forum every year since I became Secretary of State. And of course, this is my last one as Secretary of State. And I'm very glad that you didn't applaud at that line that this is my last one. (Laughter.) I hope to see you at future AGOAs, perhaps, as a private citizen, because this is an extraordinary forum, and it has been a wonderful way for Africans to gather together with America to talk about what we can do.

In the past eight years, I've had the honor to serve the American people at a momentous time. I've had the opportunity to strengthen the foundations of my country's security, to support leaders and citizens across the world, who are trying to build peaceful, prosperous, decent, free nations, and to participate in the liberation of 55 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan. But one of the most important accomplishments, one that I've been proudest to work for, is what we've done with you, my African friends and my colleagues.

My first experience of Africa was, actually, as a young girl. I visited Liberia, where my aunt was teaching at the university in Monrovia. I wasn't there for long. I was very young, and I frankly don't remember much. But that was in the very early 1960s and it was still the dawning hours of Africa's independence. The excitement was palpable. There was a sense that anything was possible, and that the free nations of Africa would soon take their place among the community of nations, with equal dignity, with mutual respect, and with growing opportunity for the African people. I will say that for a young girl from Birmingham, Alabama, where freedom and justice were promised but still denied, Africa's example was inspiring.

We all know that the benefits and the promise of independence were slower in coming than independence itself. But that is history, and we can't go back and change that history. What we can do is to shape a better future. And I believe that over the past several years, there has been a sea change in the way that your nations approach your own challenges, in the way that America approaches our African friends, and in the way that the world perceives Africa.

In short, more and more African leaders and citizens are reflecting the dignity of high standards – the respect and pride that comes from holding oneself and one's nation to the most ambitious goals of political, economic, and social progress and meeting them by your own energy and your own efforts. A new spirit of responsibility is alive in Africa today among people and governments that are meeting their own challenges, creating opportunity for all, connecting their citizens to the world, competing and succeeding in the global economy, and doing it themselves.

There is a new enthusiasm in Africa today – a renewed spirit of independence and it's magnificent to see. And it's certainly changing the world's perception of Africa. To be sure, Africa faces profound challenges: from violence in places like Darfur and Somalia, to rising commodity prices, to the disease and poverty that still rob so many of their God-given potential. Yes, Africa has challenges, but Africa and its people are not reduced to the sum of their challenges. They deserve not the world's pity, but our partnership.

And this idea – partnership – is at the center of the approach that President Bush has brought to Africa. Our partnership has been sustained, not only by increasing responsibility and accountability of Africa's leaders, but also by the deep generosity of the American people in response and by the bipartisan commitment of our Congress. Our partnership is evident in the growing cooperation among our governments, but it is most powerful and promising in the entrepreneurial spirit of our people as they work together. That is why the idea of partnership is at the heart of initiatives like the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, which our administration has been proud to renew and expand. And today we welcome the two newest members of this Forum: Togo and Comoros.

The new partnership that Africa and America are building together touches on every field of human endeavor that is vital to human flourishing: ending conflicts, expanding free and fair trade, investing in health and education, and strengthening good, lawful, democratic governance.

President Bush and I are proud of the dramatic increases in support to Africa that we have achieved since 2001: quadrupling U.S. foreign assistance, billions of dollars of debt relief for Africa's 27 poorest nations, launching the Millennium Challenge Account initiative, signing nearly \$4.3 billion worth of MCC compacts with ten African nations, and forging historic partnerships to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria. Ultimately, though, we measure the success of our partnership with Africa not in dollars, but in the lives that we have sought to improve.

We measure our success, Africans and Americans together, by the fact that, since 2001, nine conflicts that long plagued the continent have now ended, and we must remain vigilant to consolidate real peace. We measure our success by the fact that freedom and equality, democracy and the rule of law are popular in Africa, and growing more so. We measure our success by the fact that, in just the past four years, millions and millions of African citizens have received life-saving information about AIDS prevention, more than 1.6 million people have received life-enhancing medication, and nearly 6.5 million people, including orphans, are now receiving critical and compassionate care. And of course, we measure our success by the fact that, due to the relentless drive of Africa's entrepreneurs, supported by AGOA, the wealth of Africa grew nearly 7 percent in just the past year, non-energy trade between the United States and AGOA nations has doubled since 2001, and U.S.-African partnerships in health and education are helping more and more people to share in the fruits of Africa's economic growth.

Now this is not to say that there are not still major challenges. There are, as we see in the heartbreaking plight of the Zimbabwean people. In the Mugabe regime, we see the page of history that Africa must turn – a leader for independence, which inherited a nation full of promise, but which has devolved into a tyranny that values nothing but power. It is hard to imagine how Africa will ever reach its full potential until all of its leaders are accountable to and respectful of the will of its people. Southern Africa will face perennial instability until the peaceful aspirations of all Zimbabweans are respected and reflected in their government. This is Africa's challenge, and Africa must succeed.

But though these challenges do remain, ladies and gentlemen, I am really optimistic about the future of Africa. I am proud of the support that the United States has given to your success over these past eight years. And I know that our shared future, like our shared past, will continue to exceed all expectations.

Because you see, perhaps more than any two peoples anywhere in the world, the American people and the people of Africa share a lasting common bond. It was the stolen sons and daughters of Africa who showed America the true promise of our own independence – the true meaning of what the ringing phrase "all men are created equal" had to mean. It was Africa's struggle for liberation half a century ago that inspired the struggle for justice among descendants of Africa in my country, and in my hometown. And in this new century, it will be the partnership between your nations and ours, between your people and ours; that will enable all the people of Africa to achieve the hope and the respect and the justice that they deserve.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)
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