

Remarks by Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
U.S. Independence Day Celebration and Welcome Reception
U.S. Ambassador's Residence, Gaborone
July 12, 2011

As prepared for delivery

- The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Honorable Phandu Skelemani
- Other Ministers
- Dikgosi
- Members of Parliament
- Government Officials
- Colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I welcome you, our many friends and colleagues, in joining us to celebrate America's Independence Day.

I am particularly pleased that so many Batswana are with us because this event also serves as my first opportunity to host you since my recent arrival in Botswana.

We are also joined by many of our diplomatic colleagues and civil society partners.

As the United States Ambassador to Botswana, I represent my government's strong interest in Botswana's future, so it is with true professional pride that I welcome you to my home for our national day celebration.

Americans recently marked the 235th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence – my country's first step toward freedom and democracy for its people.

Citizens of the United States revere the Declaration and what it stands for – for it establishes what independence means to an American.

- unalienable rights,

- life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and
- government powers derived by the consent of the governed.

These concepts form our essence, and the American project is an ongoing effort to honor these principles. Americans are great optimists. We believe in the promise of the future if we just keep trying to get it right.

We firmly believe that from freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, spring the dynamism and economic activity that develops a nation, alongside the political and social order that sustains it.

Dynamism, economic growth, rule-governed political and social order – these are concepts that are well known – and appreciated – in Botswana.

Botswana has rightly earned praise from across the world for its tremendous strides in cementing firm democratic credentials.

As Americans and Botswana alike know, democracy thrives precisely because we all have a voice and rights that must be respected.

And we agree on the fundamental ideals of transparent and open discussion, and a viable and responsible voice of opposition, and a commitment to invest in our people.

These areas of fundamental agreement make this an important partnership, as these are the values that will inform our ability to tackle the challenges of the future.

I spent the first two years of President Obama's term working at the White House as a Special Assistant to the President and as the Senior Director for Africa on the National Security Council staff and I gave a lot of thought to the big picture of what the United States should be trying to achieve in the region.

I had the opportunity to discuss our strategic vision with the President many times – and I described where Botswana fits in that vision to the United States Senate when they confirmed

my appointment as Ambassador – and I committed myself to this vision when I took the oath of office.

Botswana is the place where the United States should be modeling what a mature partnership with an African democracy looks like. This is the partnership we should hold high, and say to other countries – that is what we’re aiming for – that is what a real partnership, based on shared interests and mutual respect looks like.

We are indeed close partners, in many ways.

We are close partners in the response to Botswana’s gravest challenge – HIV/AIDS. Our support in this area has grown steadily over many years and even with growing budget challenges and increasingly constrained resources, America will remain a steadfast partner until the vision of an AIDS-free nation is realized.

We work together at the International Law Enforcement Academy, which is hosted by the Government of Botswana, to build the capacity of law enforcement officials from 34 countries across the continent.

We work side-by-side in conservation of the nation’s pristine and vital natural resources.

Our Peace Corps Volunteers are living in villages spread across the land, day to day working in health-related areas, but more broadly becoming vital parts of the communities in which they live.

Ours is indeed a long and deep and wide partnership, and it is one that I intend personally, and for my Embassy more broadly, to nurture and to make even stronger. I am committed to that and together we will make that happen.

For those of you who have attended our national day celebrations in years past, you may notice a slightly younger crowd than normal.

The generation of Sir Seretse Khama and Botswana’s founding fathers set the course for this nation and the many successes it was to achieve. And the sons and daughters that followed

have demonstrated their commitment to good stewardship of the nation's wealth, and investment in its people.

These leaders have earned and deserve our respect.

But I want to look over the horizon – I want to talk about the future and in whose hands it rests. As President Obama has said, Africa's future belongs to its young people – the heirs of the independence generation.

Look around you. Look at the young faces you see here today – envision those that are in school working to obtain the skills and credentials that will take them forward – and those that are in the workplace, working not just to sustain themselves, but to lay the building blocks of a better community and society.

These are the faces that will lead Botswana over the horizon – these are the uncrowned leaders that will chart the nation's future course.

Let me say clearly – it is in the interest of Botswana – and indeed the interest of the United States:

- that today's Botswana youth are healthy and vibrant and able to face the future,
- that they are well-educated and skilled and imaginative so they have ready the tools necessary to solve tomorrow's problems, and
- that they are confident and have a voice that is respected and responded to so that they can lead others to a brighter day.

In short, today's youth must be empowered to shape the future. They must be tapped as the vital resource they are, and they must be integral to reaching the potential of this nation.

With empowerment, however, comes responsibility.

To tomorrow's leaders, I say this – you will have in your hand awesome power, but you must know to wield it wisely.

Start now,

- with study that builds your ability,
- with hard work that adds value to every endeavor,
- with behavior that preserves your health, and
- with a vision of success that extends beyond your personal comfort to better your community and take this great country forward.

So, as Americans recall our independence, and renew, as we must always do, our commitment to a nation built on fundamental notions of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I hope that tomorrow's leaders in Botswana will consider what you hold most dear about your country, and think big, about what you want Botswana's future to hold. And I hope that you might share, today and in the future, in a bit of our American optimism.

In closing, please let me just say again how honored I am to be in Botswana, to represent the people of the United States, and to take on the challenge of strengthening our partnership so that together with today's – and tomorrow's – leaders, we can build a brighter future.

So, with that, please join me as I raise my glass in a toast to the continued good health of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Botswana, Lt. General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, and to the health, prosperity, and well-being of the people of Botswana, that they too may enjoy the benefits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

To the President --

Thank you.

And now it's my great privilege to introduce the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Honorable Phandu Skelemani.