

**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT THE YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE
TOWN HALL**

**Washington, D.C.
August 3, 2016**

...As President, I've now visited Sub-Saharan Africa four times, which is more than any other U.S. President. And even as Africa continues to face enormous challenges -- poverty and disease and conflict -- I see a continent on the move. You have one of the world's fastest-growing regions, home to a middle class that is projected to grow to over 1 billion consumers. You are more connected by technology and smartphones than ever before -- as I can see here today. Africa is sending more of its children to school. You're saving more lives from HIV/AIDS and infant mortality. And while there's still more work to do to address these challenges, today's Africa is a place of unprecedented prosperity and opportunity.

So over the past seven and a half years, I've worked to transform America's relationship with Africa so that we are equal partners. As so many Africans have told me, you want trade not aid -- trade that supports jobs and growth. So we've been working to boost exports with Africa. We're working to promote good governance and human rights; to advance security; to help feed families.

Earlier today, I signed a new executive order so that we're doing even more to support American companies that are interested in doing business in Africa. And this fall, we'll host the second U.S.-Africa Business Forum to encourage more trade and investment. And we're going to keep working together in our Power Africa initiative to bring cleaner electricity to more than 60 million African homes and businesses.

And we're doing this not just because I love the people of Africa, but also because the world will not be able to deal with climate change or terrorism, or expanding women's rights -- all the issues that we face globally -- without a rising and dynamic and self-reliant Africa. And that, more importantly than anything else, depends on a rising generation of new leaders. It depends on you.

That's why, six years ago, I launched the Young African Leaders Initiative. Because I've always believed that one person can be a force for positive change; that one person, as Bobby Kennedy famously said when he visited Soweto, that one person can be like a stone, a pebble thrown in a lake, creating ripples -- ripples of hope, he called it. And that's especially true for all of you. You're young, you're talented, optimistic. You're already showing you can make a difference. So what we wanted to do through YALI is to connect you with each other and to resources and to networks that can help you become the leaders in business and government and civil society of tomorrow.

...

Probably the most frustrating challenge that I've had on an ongoing basis typically involves conflicts outside of the United States. Syria is the toughest example. But the conflicts that we continue to see in South Sudan, for example, where after years of fighting and millions of people dead, finally there was the opportunity to create an independent country of South Sudan. And yet now, within South Sudan, there is still conflict between the two countries -- or between two factions. Those are very challenging because the United States, on the one hand, cannot police and govern every spot in the world. On the other hand, people look to us to have a positive influence. And our goal has been consistently to try to bring people together so that they can sit down and resolve issues politically rather than through violence.

...Now so often the greatest suffering arises out of either ethnic conflict or sectarian conflict or states that are unstable. And the consequences for ordinary people in those countries are enormous. And in some ways, it's harder to stop those kinds of conflicts than it is simply to defeat an army that is clearly identified.

And the challenge of terrorist networks, which has been an ongoing project of ours and many of our partners around the world, is tied up with this issue -- because when you have regional conflicts and young people are displaced and they are without education and they are without prospects and they're without hope, then the possibilities of them being recruited into an organization like ISIL or al Qaeda or Boko Haram, even if it's just a tiny, small percentage, is obviously going to be higher than if people are given opportunity and there's stability in their lives.

So the one thing that I know is that the way we're going to solve these problems is not in isolation but by having people of good will from across regions, across continents working together. And that begins with many of the young people like you around the world who are trying to do the right thing.

...

I do believe that there are certain principles that apply everywhere. I believe that governments should follow the law and not be arbitrary. I believe that every individual has certain rights -- to speak freely, and to practice their own faith freely, and to assemble peacefully to petition their government. I believe that women should be treated equally, and if you come from a country in which it is traditional to beat women or not give them an education, or engage in genital mutilation, then you should change your traditions because those are bad practices.

And so I do think it is important for us to stand up for those principles, recognizing that we're not perfect, that we need to listen to criticism just like other countries do, and also recognize that even as we may sanction a country, for example, we also need to engage with them so that there becomes the opportunity for dialogue and hopefully we can have some positive influence.

...

I think the importance of accountability and transparency in government is the starting point for any society improving. And that also means that the press has responsibilities to make sure that it's accurate, to make sure that it doesn't just chase whatever is the most sensational but tries to be thoughtful and present, as best it can, a fair view of what's happening. But in the end, I'd rather have the press err on the side of freedom, even if sometimes it's a little inaccurate, than to have the person who is governing the country making decisions about who is wrong and who is right and who can say what and who can publish what. Because that's the path to not just dictatorship, but it's also the path to not fixing the real problems that exist.

...

I think in each of your countries, it is really important for your current leadership and many of you who will be future leaders to make sure that, first and foremost, that educational infrastructure is in place. And it has to be provided for everybody -- not just boys, but girls -- and it's got to start early, because you can't leave half of your population behind and expect that you're going to succeed...

[I]t's not enough just to educate a population. You then also have to have rules in place where if you want to start a business you don't have to pay a bribe. Or you don't have to hire somebody's cousin who then is not going to show up on the job but expects to get paid. Or if you want to get electricity installed, you have to wait for five months to get a line into your office.

So all the rules, the regulations, the laws, the structures that are in place to encourage development and growth -- that has to be combined with the education in order for those young people who now have talent to be able to move forward... And I am a strong believer that government -- strong, effective, transparent government -- is a precondition for a market-based economy. You can't have one without the other.

...

[P]art of the reason why I love this program is this isn't a matter of what America is doing for you, this is us being partners but mainly seeing what you can do yourselves to change, transform, and build your countries...

There are over 50 countries represented here. It represents a wide spectrum. Some of you are going to go back and what you're doing is welcomed. Some of you will go back and not so much. Depending on the kinds of things that you want to -- maybe if you're just focused on public health, you'll get less resistance. If you are interested in human rights or democracy, you might get more resistance. There are some countries where you being active and speaking out publicly can be dangerous. There are some places where it's welcomed. There are some places where freedom of the press is observed; other places where it is viewed as objectionable.

I can't, and America cannot, solve all those problems. And if I were to promise that, I would not be telling the truth. But what I can do is to make sure that the program continues, that the network continues to get built, and that the

State Department is engaged with your countries explaining why what you represent is so important to the continent.

###