

**Remarks for President Barack Obama
Address to the People of Africa
African Union Headquarters
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tuesday, July 28, 2015**

Good afternoon! Thank you, Madame Chairwoman, for your kind words and your leadership. To Prime Minister Hailemariam and the people of Ethiopia—once again, thank you for your hospitality and for hosting this pan-African institution. Members of the African Union, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen—thank you for welcoming me here today. It is an honor to be the first president of the United States to address the African Union.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to the representatives of the more than one billion people of the great African continent. We are joined today by citizens and leaders of civil society and faith communities, and I am especially pleased to see so many young people who embody the energy and optimism of today's Africa. Hello! Thank you all for being here.

I stand before you as a proud American. I also stand before you as the son of an African. Africa and its people have helped shape who I am and how I see the world.

In the villages in Kenya where my father was born, I learned of my ancestors, the life of my grandfather, the dreams of my father and the bonds of family that connect us as Africans and Americans.

As parents, Michelle and I want to make sure that our two daughters know their heritage—European and African, in all its struggle and strength. We’ve stood with them on the shores of West Africa, in those doors of no return, mindful that their ancestors were both slaves and slave owners.

We've stood with them in that small cell on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela showed the world that, no matter the nature of his physical confinement, he alone was the master of his fate. In others words, Africa and its people teach us a powerful lesson—we must uphold the inherent dignity of every human being.

Dignity—that basic idea that by virtue of our common humanity, no matter where we come from or who we are or what we look like, we are all born equal, touched by the grace of God. Every person has worth. Every person matters.

Every person deserves to be treated with decency and respect. Throughout much of history, mankind did not see this. Dignity was seen as a virtue reserved to those of rank or privilege, kings and elders. It took a revolution of the spirit, over many centuries, to open our eyes to the dignity of every person. And around the world, generations have struggled to put this idea into practice in laws and institutions.

So too, here in Africa. This is the cradle of humanity, and ancient African kingdoms were home to great libraries and universities.

But the evil of slavery took root, not only abroad, but here on the continent.

Colonialism skewed Africa's economy and robbed people of their capacity to shape their own destiny. Eventually, liberation movements grew. And fifty years ago, in a great burst of self-determination, Africans rejoiced as foreign flags came down and your national flags went up. As South Africa's Albert Luthuli (La-TOO-lee) said at the time, "the basis for peace and brotherhood in Africa is being restored by the resurrection of national sovereignty and independence, of equality and the dignity of man."

A half century into this independence era, it is long past time to put aside old stereotypes of an Africa forever mired in poverty and conflict. The world must recognize Africa's extraordinary progress. Today, Africa is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world. Africa's middle class is projected to grow to more than one billion consumers. With hundreds of millions of mobile phones and surging access to the internet, Africans have the potential to leapfrog old technologies into new prosperity. So Africa is on the move, and a new Africa is emerging.

Propelled by this progress, and in partnership with the world, Africa has achieved historic gains in health. The rate of new HIV/AIDS infections has plummeted. African mothers are more likely to survive childbirth and have healthy babies. Deaths from malaria have been slashed, saving the lives of millions of African children. Millions have been lifted from extreme poverty. Africa has led the world in sending more children to school. Put simply, more and more African men, women and children are living with dignity and hope.

Africa's progress can also be seen in the institution that brings us together today. When I first came to Sub-Saharan Africa as president, I said that Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions. One of those institutions can be the African Union. Here, you can come together, with a shared commitment to human dignity and development. Here, your 54 nations pursue a common vision of an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa."

As Africa changes, I've called on the world to change its approach to Africa.

So many Africans have told me—we don't just want aid, we want trade that fuels our progress. We don't want patrons, we want partners who help us build our own capacity to grow. We don't want the indignity of dependence, we want to make our own choices and determine our own future.

As President, I've worked to transform America's relationship with Africa—so that we're truly listening to our African friends and working together, as equal partners.

And I'm proud of the progress we've made. We've boosted American exports to this region, part of trade that supports jobs for Africans and Americans. To sustain our momentum—and with the bipartisan support of Members of Congress, twenty of whom are here today—I recently signed the ten year renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

We've launched major initiatives to promote food security, public health and access to electricity, and to prepare the next generation of African leaders and entrepreneurs—investments that will help fuel Africa's rise for decades to come.

Last year, I welcomed nearly 50 African presidents and prime ministers to Washington so we could begin a new chapter of cooperation. By coming to the African Union today, I'm looking to build on that commitment. I believe Africa's rise is also important to the entire world. We will not be able to meet the challenges of our time—from ensuring a strong global economy to facing down violent extremism to combating climate change to ending hunger and extreme poverty—without the voices and contributions of one billion Africans.

Still, even with Africa's impressive progress, we must acknowledge that these gains rest on a fragile foundation. Alongside new wealth, hundreds of millions of Africans still endure extreme poverty. Alongside high-tech hubs of innovation, many Africans are crowded into shantytowns without power or running water—a level of poverty that's an assault on human dignity.

Moreover, as the youngest and fastest-growing continent, Africa's population in the coming decades will double—to some two billion people, and many of them will be young, under 18.

On the one hand, this could bring tremendous opportunities as these young Africans harness new technologies and ignite new growth and reforms. On the other hand, we need only look to the Middle East and North Africa to see that large numbers of young people with no jobs and stifled voices can fuel instability and disorder.

I suggest to you that the most urgent task facing Africa today and for the decades ahead is to create opportunity for this next generation. This will be an enormous undertaking. Africa will need to generate millions more jobs than it is doing now.

And time is of the essence. The choices made today will shape the trajectory of Africa for decades to come. As your partner and friend, allow me to suggest several ways we can meet this challenge together.

Africa's progress will depend on unleashing economic growth—not just for the few at the top, but for the many, because an essential element of dignity is being able to live a decent life. That begins with a job, and that requires trade and investment.

Many of your nations have made important reforms to attract investment—it's been a spark for growth. But in many places across Africa, it's still too hard to start a venture and to build a business. Governments that take additional reforms to make doing business easier will have an eager partner in America.

That includes reforms to help Africa trade more with itself, because the biggest markets for your goods are often right next door. Our work to help Africa modernize customs and border crossings started with the East African Community.

Now we're expanding our efforts across the continent, because it shouldn't be harder for African countries to trade with each other than it is for you to trade with Europe and America.

Most U.S. trade with the region is with just three countries—South Africa, Nigeria and Angola—and much of that is energy. I want Africans and Americans doing more business together in more sectors in more countries. So we're increasing trade missions to places like Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique. We're working to help more Africans get their goods to market.

Next year, we'll host another U.S.-Africa Business Forum to mobilize billions of dollars in new trade and investment—so we're buying more of each other's products and all growing together.

Of course, the United States isn't the only country that sees your growth as an opportunity. This is a good thing. When more countries invest responsibly in Africa, it creates more jobs and prosperity for us all. But economic relationships cannot simply be about other countries building infrastructure with foreign labor or extracting Africa's natural resources.

Real economic partnerships have to be a good deal for Africa—they have to create jobs and capacity for Africans. That’s the kind of partnership America offers.

Nothing will unlock Africa’s economic potential more than ending the cancer of corruption. This is not unique to Africa—corruption exists all over the world, including in the United States. Here in Africa, corruption drains billions of dollars from economies—money that could be used to create jobs and to build hospitals and schools.

And when someone has to pay a bribe just to start a business or go to school or to get an official to do their job—that’s not “the African way”—it undermines the dignity of the people you represent.

Only Africans can end corruption in their countries. As African governments commit to taking action, the United States will work with you to combat illicit finance, promote good governance, transparency and rule of law. And let me add that criminal networks are both fueling corruption and threatening Africa’s precious wildlife—and with it the tourism that many African economies count on.

So America also stands with you in the fight against wildlife trafficking.

Ultimately, the most powerful antidote to the old ways of doing things is this new generation of African youth. History shows that the nations that do the best are the ones that invest in the education of their people.

In this information age, jobs can flow to where workers are literate, highly skilled and online. And Africa's young people are ready to compete. As Africa invests in education, our entrepreneurship programs are helping innovators start new businesses and create jobs right here in Africa.

And the men and women in our Young African Leaders Initiative today will be leaders who can transform businesses, civil society and governments tomorrow.

Africa's progress will depend on development that truly lifts countries from poverty to prosperity—because like people everywhere, Africans deserve the dignity of a life free from want. A child born in Africa today is just as equal and just as worthy as a child born in Asia or Europe or America. At the recent development conference here in Addis, African leadership helped forge a new global compact for the financing that fuels development.

Under the AU's leadership, the voice of a united Africa will help shape the world's next set of development goals, and you're pursuing a vision of the future you want for Africa.

America's approach to development—the central focus of our engagement with Africa—is focused on helping you build your own capacity to realize that vision. Instead of just shipping food aid to Africa, we've helped more than two million farmers use new techniques to boost their yields, feed more people, and reduce hunger.

With our new alliance of governments and the private sector investing billions of dollars in African agriculture, I believe we can achieve our goal and lift 50 million Africans from poverty.

Instead of just sending aid to build power plants, our Power Africa initiative is mobilizing billions of dollars in investments from governments and businesses to reduce the number of Africans living without electricity. An undertaking of this magnitude will not be quick. It will take many years.

But working together, I believe we can bring electricity to more than 60 million African homes and businesses and connect more Africans to the global economy.

Instead of just telling Africa you're on your own in dealing with climate change, we're delivering new tools and financing to more than 40 African nations to help them prepare and adapt. By harnessing the wind and sun, your vast geothermal energy and rivers for hydropower, you can turn this climate threat into economic opportunity.

I urge Africa to join us in rejecting old divides between North and South so we can forge a strong global climate agreement this year. Because sparing some of the world's poorest people from rising seas, more intense droughts and shortages of water and food is a matter of survival and a matter of human dignity.

Instead of just sending medicine, we're investing in better treatments and helping Africa better prevent and treat disease.

As the United States continues to provide billion of dollars in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and as your countries take greater ownership of health programs, we're moving toward an historic accomplishment—the first AIDS-free generation.

And if the world learned anything from Ebola, it's that the best way to prevent epidemics is to build strong public health systems that stop diseases from spreading in the first place. America is proud to partner with the AU and African countries in this mission.

Today, I can announce that of the \$1 billion that the United States is devoting to this work globally, half will support efforts here in Africa.

Africa's progress will also depend on democracy, because Africans, like people everywhere, deserve the dignity of being in control of their own lives. We all know what the ingredients of real democracy are. They include free and fair elections. Freedom of speech and the press. Freedom of assembly. These rights are universal. They're written into African constitutions.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights declares that “every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being.” From Sierra Leone, Ghana and Benin...to Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, democracy has taken root. In Nigeria, more than 28 million voters bravely cast their ballots and power transferred as it should—peacefully.

Yet at this very moment, these same freedoms are denied to many Africans. Democracy is not just formal elections.

When journalists are put behind bars for doing their jobs, or activists are threatened as governments crack down on civil society, then you may have democracy in name, but not substance. Nations cannot realize the full promise of independence until they fully protect the rights of their people. This is true even for countries that have made important democratic progress.

As I indicated during my visit to Kenya, the remarkable gains that country has made cannot be jeopardized by restrictions on civil society. Likewise, Ethiopians have much to be proud of, and the elections that took place here occurred without violence.

But as I discussed with Prime Minister Hailemariam, that is only the start of democracy. I believe that Ethiopia cannot unleash the full potential of its people if it jails journalists or restricts legitimate opposition groups from participating in the campaign process. And, to his credit, the Prime Minister acknowledged that more work will need to be done if Ethiopia is to be a full-fledged and sustainable democracy.

The bottom line is that when citizens cannot exercise their rights, the world has a responsibility to speak out, and America will, even if it is sometimes uncomfortable—and even when it's directed toward our friends.

We do so not because our democracy is perfect—we are not. More than two centuries since our independence, we are still working to perfect our union. Nor are we immune from criticism. When we fall short of our ideals, we strive to do better. You see, when we speak out for our principles, at home and abroad, we stay true to our values and we help lift up the lives of people beyond our borders.

If I can speak frankly, we believe that other nations can do more to speak out as well, including African nations.

Just as other countries championed your break from colonialism, our nations must all raise our voices when universal rights are denied. For if we truly believe that Africans are equal in dignity, then Africans have an equal right to freedoms that are universal—that's a principle we all have to defend.

Today, Africa's democratic progress is also at risk from leaders who refuse to step aside when their terms end. I have to be honest with you—I just don't understand this.

I am in my second term. Under our constitution, I cannot run again. There's still so much I want to get done to keep America moving forward. But the law is the law and no one is above it, not even presidents. And, frankly, I'm looking forward to life after being President. It will mean more time with my family, new ways to serve, and more visits to Africa.

When a leader tries to change the rules in the middle of the game just to stay in office, it risks instability and strife, as we've seen in Burundi. And it's often just a first step down a perilous path.

But if a leader thinks they're the only person who can hold their nation together, then that leader has failed to truly build their country. In contrast, Nelson Mandela—like George Washington—forged a lasting legacy by being willing to leave office and transfer power peacefully.

And just as the African Union has condemned coups and illegitimate transfers of power, the AU's authority and strong voice can also help the people of Africa ensure that their leaders abide by term limits and their constitutions. No one should be president for life.

Africa's progress will also depend on security and peace—because an essential part of human dignity is being safe and free from fear. In Angola, Mozambique, Liberia and Sierra Leone, we have seen conflicts end and countries work to rebuild. But from Somalia and Nigeria to Mali and Tunisia, terrorists continue to target innocent civilians. Many of these groups claim the banner of religion, but hundreds of millions of African Muslims know that Islam means peace. We must call groups like al Qaeda, ISIL, al-Shabaab and Boko Haram what they are—murderers.

In the face of threats, Africa—and the African Union—has shown leadership. Because of the AU force in Somalia, al-Shabaab controls less territory and the Somali government is growing stronger. In central Africa, the AU-led mission continues to degrade the Lord's Resistance Army. In the Lake Chad basin, forces from several nations—with the backing of the AU—are fighting to end Boko Haram's senseless brutality. And today, we salute all those who serve to protect the innocent, including so many brave African peacekeepers.

As Africa stands against terror and conflict, the United States stands with you. With training and support, we're helping African forces grow stronger. The United States is supporting the AU's efforts to strengthen peacekeeping, and we're working with countries in the region to deal with emerging crises with the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership.

The world must do more to help as well. This fall at the United Nations, I will host a summit to secure new commitments to strengthen international support for peacekeeping, including here in Africa.

And building on commitments that originated here in the AU, we'll work to develop a new partnership between the UN and the AU that can provide reliable support for AU peace operations. If African governments and international partners step up with strong support, we can transform how we work together to promote security and peace in Africa.

Our efforts to ensure our shared security must be matched by a commitment to improve governance.

Our fight against terrorist groups, for example, will never be won if we fail to address the grievances that terrorists exploit, if we don't build trust with all communities, and if we don't uphold the rule of law. There's a saying, and it's true—if we sacrifice liberty in the name of security, we risk losing both.

This same seriousness of purpose is needed to end conflicts. In the Central African Republic, the spirit of dialogue recently shown by ordinary citizens must be matched by leaders committed to inclusive elections and a peaceful transition.

In Mali, the comprehensive peace agreement must be fulfilled. And leaders in Sudan must know that their nation will never truly thrive so long as they wage war against their own people—and the world will not forget about Darfur.

In South Sudan, the joy of independence has descended into the despair of violence.

Neither Salva Kiir nor (REE-ahk Mah-SHAR) have shown any interest in sparing their people from this suffering or in reaching a political solution. Yesterday, I met with leaders from this region.

We agree that, given the urgency of the situation, Salva Kiir and (REE-ahk Mah-SHAR) must reach an agreement by August 17. If they do not, I believe the international community must raise the costs of their intransigence. And the world awaits the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry, because accountability for atrocities must be part of any lasting peace in Africa's youngest nation.

Finally, Africa's progress will depend on upholding the human rights of all people—for if each of us is to be treated with dignity, each of must be treated equally. As

President, I make it a point to meet with many of our Young African Leaders.

One was a young man from Senegal. He said something wonderful about being together with so many of his African brothers and sisters. He said, “here, I have met Africa, the [Africa] I have always believed in. She’s beautiful. She’s young. She’s full of talent and motivation and ambition.” I agree.

Africa is the beautiful, talented daughters who are just as capable as Africa’s sons. As a father, I believe that my two daughters ought to have every chance to pursue their dreams—and the same goes for girls here in

Africa. We can't let old traditions stand in the way.

The march of history shows that we have the capacity to broaden our moral imaginations. We come to see that some traditions keep us grounded, but that, in our modern world, other traditions set us back.

When African girls are subjected to the mutilation of their bodies, or early or forced marriage, that sets us back, and it needs to end. When more than 80 percent of new HIV cases in the hardest hit countries are teenage girls, that's a tragedy and it sets us back.

So America is beginning a partnership with ten African countries—Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe—to keep teenage girls safe and AIDS-free.

And when girls cannot go to school and grow up not knowing how to read or write—that denies the world future women engineers and presidents—that sets us all back.

So as part of America's support for the education and the health of our daughters, my wife Michelle is helping to lead a global campaign, including a new effort in Tanzania and Malawi, with a simple message—let girls learn so they grow up healthy and strong.

Africa is the beautiful, strong women these girls grow to become. The single best indicator of whether a nation will succeed is how it treats its women. When women have health care and education, families are stronger, communities are more prosperous and nations are more successful—just look at all the amazing African women here in this hall today.

**If you want to empower more women,
America will be your partner. Let's work
together to stop sexual assault and domestic
violence. Let's make clear that we will not
tolerate rape as weapon of war—it is a crime
and those who commit it must be punished.
Let's lift up the next generation of women
leaders who can help fight injustice and forge
peace and start new businesses and create
jobs—and probably hire some men, too.
We'll all be better off when women have
equal futures.**

**And Africa is the beautiful tapestry of your
cultures, ethnicities, races and religions.**

Yesterday, I had the privilege to view Lucy, our ancestor—more than 3 million years old. In this tree of humanity, with all our branches and diversity, we all go back to the same root. We are all one family—one tribe.

Yet so much of the suffering in our world stems from our failure to remember that; to not recognize ourselves in each other. For when we begin to see others as somehow less than ourselves—when we succumb to artificial divisions of faith or sect or tribe—then even the most awful abuses may seem justified. And in the end, abusers lose their humanity, too.

As Madiba taught us, “to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

Every one of us is equal. Every one of us has worth. Every one of us matters. When we respect the freedom of others—no matter the color of their skin, how they pray or who they are or who they love—we are all more free. My dignity depends on yours, and yours on mine. Just imagine if everyone had that spirit in their hearts.

Just imagine what the world could look like—the future we could bequeath to all these young people here today.

Yes, in our world, old thinking can be a stubborn thing. But I believe the human heart is stronger. And hearts can change. And then minds open. That's how change happens. That's how societies move forward, step by halting step, toward those ideals of justice and equality. That's how your nations won independence. It's how African Americans won our civil rights. It's how South Africans—black and white—tore down apartheid.

And it's why I can stand before you today as the first African American president of the United States.

Unleashing growth that creates opportunity. Promoting development that lifts people from poverty. Supporting democracy that gives citizens their say. Advancing the security and justice that delivers peace. Respecting the human rights of all people. These are the keys to progress, in Africa and around the world. This is the work we can do together—and I am hopeful.

As I prepare to return home, my thoughts are the same as that young man from Senegal. “Here, I have met Africa, the [Africa] I have always believed in. She’s beautiful. She’s young. She’s full of talent and motivation and ambition.”

To which I would simply add, as you build the Africa you believe in, you will have no better partner and friend than the United States of America. God bless Africa. Thank you.