

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OBAMA AT OPENING SESSION OF THE U.S.-AFRICA LEADERS SUMMIT

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Good morning, everyone. Michelle and I were honored to host you and your wonderful spouses at dinner last night. I hope people didn't stay out too late. The evening was a chance to celebrate the bonds between our peoples. And this morning, we continue our work, and it's my privilege to welcome you to this first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

Let me also thank our Secretary of State, John Kerry, and everybody here at the State Department who's hosting us today. John and his team are doing outstanding work deepening our partnership with so many of your nations. So, John, thank you for your outstanding work.

I want to begin by welcoming President Conde of Guinea, and noting that two leaders were not able to join us -- President Sirleaf of Liberia and President Koroma of Sierra Leone. We are grateful for the presence of their delegations, even as these countries are focused on a very difficult situation back home. And on behalf of all of us here today, our thoughts and prayers are with those who've been affected by the Ebola outbreak, especially those who've lost loved ones.

The United States and our international partners will continue to do whatever we can to help our African partners respond to this crisis and to stand with the people of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In their histories they've overcome great challenges, and they are drawing on that same spirit of strength and resilience today.

So we come together this week because, even as the continent faces significant challenges, as I said last night, I believe a new Africa is emerging. With some of the world's fastest-growing economies, a growing middle class, and the youngest and fastest-growing population on Earth, Africa will help shape the world as never before.

Moreover, Africa's progress is being led by Africans, including leaders represented here today. More governments are embracing economic reforms, attracting record levels of investment. Gains in development, increasing agricultural production, declining rates in infectious diseases are being driven by African plans. African security forces and African peacekeepers are risking their lives to meet regional threats. A new generation of young Africans is making its voice heard.

Africa's rise means opportunity for all of us -- including the opportunity to transform the relationship between the United States and Africa. As I said in Cape Town last year, it's time for a new model of partnership between America and Africa -- a partnership of

equals that focuses on African capacity to solve problems, and on Africa's capacity to grow. And that's why we're here.

To my fellow leaders, I want to thank you and your teams for helping us to shape our agenda today. Our work can build on the valuable contributions already made this week by civil society groups, the private sector, young Africans, and -- at our first session of this summit -- our faith communities, which do so much to sustain the U.S.-Africa relationship. Different though they may be, our faith traditions remind us of the inherent dignity of every human being and that our work as nations must be rooted in empathy and compassion for each other, as brothers and as sisters.

Today is an opportunity to focus on three broad areas where we can make progress together.

Number one, we have the opportunity to expand trade that creates jobs. The new trade deals and investments I announced yesterday are an important step. And today we can focus on what we can do, as governments, to accelerate that investment -- economic and regulatory reforms, regional integration, and development so that growth is broad-based, especially among women, who must be empowered for economies to truly flourish.

Second, we have the opportunity to strengthen the governance upon which economic growth and free societies depend. Today we can focus on the ingredients of progress: rule of law, open government, accountable and transparent institutions, strong civil societies, and respect for the universal human rights of all people.

And finally, we have the opportunity to deepen our security cooperation against common threats. As I said, African security forces and African peacekeepers are in the lead across the continent. As your partner, the United States is proud to support these efforts. And today, we can focus on how we can continue to strengthen Africa's capacity to meet transitional threats -- transnational threats, and in so doing make all of our nations more secure.

So, in short, we are here not just to talk. We are here to take action -- concrete steps to build on Africa's progress and forge the partnerships of equals that we seek; tangible steps to deliver more prosperity, more security, and more justice to our citizens. So, to my fellow leaders, again, thank you so much for being here. I look forward to our work together today.

And at this point, I want to invite President Aziz of Mauritania, the current Chairman of the African Union, to say a few words.