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The United States and South Africa In An Interdependent World: A Partnership of Mutual Benefit

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Below follows the edited text of a speech he delivered to
the Durban Branch of SAIIA in November 1997.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you about the present state of relations between the United States and South Africa. It is a relationship that has from the beginning taken place on two tracks, government-to-government and people-to-people. It is impossible, therefore, to speak of United States - South Africa relations without speaking of the extraordinary range of individuals and institutions engaged with each other across a wide spectrum of our two democracies.

Very few South Africans are aware, however, of the scope and scale of that engagement. Very few know how many Americans supported and helped sustain the anti-apartheid struggle, and very few know the extent of American support for the transformations now taking place. I want, therefore, to speak to you about:

- (1) the unique role of the United States - South Africa Binational Commission in promoting and enhancing the partnership between our two countries;
- (2) why, in a time of budget constraints and exploding social needs in the United States, we continue to provide such strong support for South Africa; and
- (3) how our two countries can work together to support the march of democracy and improve the quality of life on the African Continent and in an interdependent world.

The US-South Africa Binational Commission

Under the leadership of Vice-President Al Gore and Deputy President Mbeki, the United States and

South Africa have built a broad, deep and enduring partnership that works through a Binational Commission (BNC) inaugurated on 1 March 1995. The Commission meets twice a year, alternating between US and South African venues. It has seven working committees: Agriculture; Conservation, Environment and Water; Human Resource Development and Education; Science and Technology; Sustainable Energy; Military and Defence; and Trade and Investment. The Binational Commission is not a substitute for, nor does it seek to supplant, normal bilateral diplomatic, political, economic, trade or people-to-people ties. It does, however, supplement the normal diplomatic relationship in several very important ways:

- It elevates the bilateral relationship to the highest levels of our two governments under the leadership of Vice-President Gore and Deputy President Mbeki.
- It expands the relationship to include Cabinet officers and other senior officials in our two governments in partnerships that are unprecedented. No US Vice-President in history and no domestic Cabinet Secretaries have ever devoted as much time to the well-being of another country as these officials have committed to South Africa.
- It provides an opportunity for the sharing of information and speedy communications on issues of concern to both our governments. When there is a problem or an opportunity in Agriculture, Energy or Natural Resources, for example, the South African Minister involved can simply pick up the telephone and call his US

counterpart direct because of the relationship of friendship and respect that has been established through the BNC. One of the best examples of information sharing is the early warning given the South African government on the coming impact of El Niño on the Southern African climate. That information has not only helped South Africa to plan for the forthcoming drought, but it can now help predict where there are likely to be malaria outbreaks as well.

- The Binational Commission brings American resources, government agencies, and people to South Africa that go far beyond what is normally found in a United States mission. When South African government leaders felt the need for help in dealing with organized crime, drug trafficking and money laundering, they asked for assistance through the Binational Commission. We responded by making available people and resources from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, Customs and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL). In addition, we put together an inter-agency co-ordination group to provide assistance in a wide variety of law enforcement and intelligence gathering areas.
- The Binational Commission provides an opportunity for leaders in business and government to work together to develop policy incentives and eliminate disincentives to trade and investment. Tax treaties have been signed, markets have been opened, technology shared and practices and policies changed because of the work of the BNC. Since the advent of the Business Development Committee of the Commission, American businesses have been investing or expanding their operations in South Africa at the rate of one per week. For the first half of this year, that pace increased to six per month. American companies now have fixed assets of almost eight billion dollars in South Africa. Together, they account for ten billion dollars of sales and employ as much as 75,000 people.
- The Binational Commission gets things done. One has only to look at a few of the projects presently under way by any one of the Committees to recognise how valuable the Commission process is to our

two countries. Identify a problem or a major issue in South Africa and you are likely to find some agency of the United States government working with a South African counterpart to find a solution. When maths and science were identified as a major area of deficiency left over from the previous government, it was through the Binational Commission that we signed an agreement to bring Peace Corps volunteers to teach maths and science in South African schools serving the majority population. We have thirty volunteers working in the Northern province and another thirty will be coming soon to work in Mpumalanga. It is in that same spirit that a grant of US\$600,000 was made to PRISM, a non-governmental organisation here in Kwazulu-Natal that takes high school students who are deficient in maths and science and gives them a second chance at careers in science and technology.

The US is also helping in housing. I recently had an opportunity to visit a township outside of Kimberley where 250 energy-efficient homes are under construction because of the leadership of our Energy department under the auspices of the Binational Commission. The energy efficient homes in the Northern Cape are just the beginning of a much larger project that will include other provinces as well.

Without much fanfare, American assistance is helping to improve the functioning of government at all levels, expand and improve basic education, provide support for housing construction, improve health care, create jobs, conserve water, eliminate pollution, develop local community leadership, resolve local and regional conflicts and contribute to a wide variety of additional efforts to consolidate nonracial democracy. After the last Binational Commission meeting in Washington both Deputy President Mbeki and Vice-President Gore announced that this was the most productive meeting ever. Even former sceptics must now look at what is being accomplished and acknowledge that this is a process that is working and a partnership that is critically important.

Why South Africa?

When asked, at the Commission meeting in Cape Town earlier this year, why the Clinton Administration places so much importance on South Africa, Vice-President Gore replied 'First, we are on the same journey, trying to create a non-racial

democracy with justice and economic opportunity for everyone regardless of gender, religion or ethnic origin. If South Africa succeeds, it will have global impact (by demonstrating a model of community that works for all its citizens); Second, if South Africa succeeds economically, it will not only create a model for development, but it will provide a beacon of hope for the whole continent. A strong South African economy would become the engine of growth which powers other countries, especially in Southern Africa'.

South Africa is small in economic stature, generating less than one percent of the global economic output, but South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy has imbued the country and its leaders with international and moral authority that goes far beyond the size of the economy or population. We are pleased, therefore to have South Africa as a partner that shares many of our values and interests.

It is no secret that while we share many values in common, our countries have different histories that lead occasionally to different views of our national interests. But as I have said before, and find it necessary to repeat from time to time, the areas of agreement are so many that they are able to withstand the few areas in which we disagree. We respect South Africa's policy of universality and the right to choose its own friends based on its own priorities, but we ask all our friends to join with us in affirming the values we share, especially the respect for human rights, economic freedom, free and fair elections and the rejection of state-sponsored terrorism.

Given the public attention focused on occasional differences, let me say clearly and unequivocally that we respect and strongly support South Africa's sovereignty as an independent self-governing nation. Too many Americans fought too long and too hard for a new South Africa, a representative government, a free people in a free country, for any American to engage in any activity that would undermine the overwhelming amount of goodwill that exists between our two people.

Aid and Trade: The Untold Story

I need only say a word about a few other areas of US involvement in South Africa to demonstrate the extent of that goodwill. In addition to the United States government, there are foundations, corporations, universities, churches and NGOs from almost every conceivable field, including health, human rights and legal services, small business development, environmental protection, housing, agriculture, religion, education and both

the visual and performing arts. What is not generally known is that the financial contribution of these groups taken together is in excess of a billion rands annually.

If you want to know the state of relations between the United States and South Africa, you have only to accompany me on my visits to places few South Africans travel. I have visited with women in the Northern Province who through small loans provided by American assistance have developed some form of employment for more than 11,000 people in a very isolated rural area. I have walked through squatter villages in the Eastern Cape with local citizens who take pride in the houses they occupy because of American assistance. I have sat in classrooms in Soweto and watched the introduction of new curricula and teaching materials that, because of American assistance, now reflect the new South Africa. I have had the same experience in Kwazulu-Natal over the last two days as I have visited AID funded programmes and projects funded through the Ambassador's self-help fund. And everywhere I have gone I have wished that more Americans and more South Africans could see what I have seen and feel what I have felt as I have witnessed the many expressions of goodwill between our two peoples.

An area of relationship between South Africa and the United States of growing importance to both countries is trade and investment. Much has been made of the fact that the selection of an American company as an equity partner with Telkom will likely lead to as many as 50,000 new jobs. But what is not known is the large number of American companies investing in South Africa. A few months ago, I met with a group of executives of American companies to get a briefing on what is happening in the economy and how American companies are responding. It was the most upbeat briefing I have had during my almost two years as the United States Ambassador. Not only do American firms make up nearly 30% of the foreign companies operating in South Africa, not only have American companies been coming into South Africa at a rate double that of all countries combined since the advent of your new democracy in 1994, but members of the American Chamber of Commerce told me that the first quarter of this year has seen a significant increase in the number of American companies expanding or opening new operations in South Africa, I heard about deals in the making, about investment opportunities and about increased confidence in the management of the economy that could create a new climate of investor optimism about the South African economy.

Another area of importance in United States - South

Africa relations is that of civil society. While the US government is far and away the dominant funding source for partnership initiatives, accounting for more than half of the support that makes the US the largest donor country in South Africa, the support from non-governmental organisations is also substantial. American foundations provided almost two hundred million rands for the support of nongovernmental organisations in South Africa last year and American business provided another two hundred million.

Collaborating on the African Continent

The bottom line, then, is that the relations between the United States and South Africa are very positive. But it is also clear that the new partnership between our two countries must now enlarge the idea of mutual benefit to include not simply efforts to improve life in our two countries, but to secure the future of an interdependent world. Like Socrates in early Greece, we will need to be able to say, each in our own way, I am not just a citizen of Athens or Greece, but a citizen of the world.

As the US and South Africa are brought closer together by the values and interest we share, we will need to work together to promote and protect those values in the wider world. So let there be no confusion about the intention of the United States. To those who ask what the United States wants in South Africa and, indeed, the world, the answer is simple. As Secretary of State Madeline Albright put it in her confirmation hearing before the United States Senate, we want 'a world in which every nation is free and every free nation is our partner, a world in which there is peace, freedom, food on the table and what President Clinton once described as the quiet miracle of normal life'.

It is a world, however, in which we face many threats. Quoting Albright again, 'Some are as old as ethnic conflicts, some as new as letter bombs, some as long-term as global warming; some as dangerous as nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands'. It is a world in which 'we must be more than audience, more than actors, we must be the authors of the history of our age'.

Clearly, one area where we must be the architects of a new age is in responding to crisis on the African continent. To many outsiders, the gains made in Africa over the last few years appear to be unravelling. The two Congos are seen as the latest example while South Africa is seen as an exception. Here, the march toward a fully non-

racial democracy is on course. But what about South Africa's neighbours who are in trouble? How should countries in the region respond? How should concerned outsiders respond?

The first answer is to recognize that many of the gains are not unravelling. There are obviously some trouble spots demanding attention, and there will be more, but it is precisely the increasing capability of some countries and international organisations on the continent to respond to crises that provides reason for optimism.

The second answer is that the time may have come to reinvigorate the discussion about an African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), to clarify some misunderstandings about the original idea and to begin public discussion of where we go from here.

The idea of an African Crisis Response Initiative was African in its genesis and should be African in its implementation. In proposing that we move toward the development of a stand-by force, the United States was responding to African interests. The US proposal was simply to support and enhance the capability of African countries to respond to African crises. The aim was to develop a partnership, not to develop a solution from abroad.

The Clinton Administration remains committed to working with African states and others to make the ACRI concept a reality. But the US commitment to the African continent goes beyond simply responding to crises. It involves the prevention of crises as well. In a recent interview Deputy President Thabo Mbeki spoke of an African 'renaissance'. That is also what Vice-President Gore had in mind when he said a strong South African economy could become the engine of growth which powers other countries on the continent as well. That is also why President Clinton has launched a major new African initiative that focuses new attention and new resources on the progress now taking place in many African countries.

The United States shares the Deputy President's vision of an African renaissance. We want to work with South Africa and others to reverse the image of Africa as a continent in crisis, a place of poverty, a region of failed governments and missed opportunity. A new day is dawning, but the image has not changed with the reality. The march toward democracy on the part of the large majority of states has too often been overshadowed by the small minority who continue to stand against the tide. Far too few people in far too many places know about the process of political reform that has

led to elections in 36 Sub-Saharan countries in the last several years. Far too few people know that the majority of African governments have embraced economic reforms that have opened markets and created economic opportunities that were beyond the wildest dream of reformers just a few years ago. While it is true that some reforms have been more successful than others, we in government, business and the media need to do a better job of telling the story of how, taken together, these reforms have created the conditions for a new era of stability, accountability and development in Africa.

Nowhere is there more potential for a major take-off than in the neighbouring states that constitute the Southern African Development Community. The partnership between the United States and South Africa is, therefore, only part of the story. South Africa is also the gateway to the 120 million people in Southern Africa and, with close to half

the GDP of all of Sub-Saharan Africa, is poised to play a significant role in shaping the economic well-being of the 600 million people who make Africa the second largest continent in the world.

The window of opportunity for an African renaissance is wide open. Future generations will not look kindly on us if we dare permit that window to close. I agree with Deputy President Mbeki when he said to the Constitutional Assembly 'Whatever the setbacks of the moment, nothing can stop Africa now. Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace. However improbable it might sound to the sceptics, Africa will prosper. Whoever we maybe, whatever our immediate interest, however much we carry baggage from our past, however much we have been caught by the fashion of cynicism and loss of faith in the capacity of the people, let us say today - nothing can stop Africa now'.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The South African Institute of International Affairs is an independent organisation which aims to promote a wider and more informed understanding of international issues among South Africans.

It seeks also to educate, inform and facilitate contact between people concerned with South Africa's place in an interdependent world, and to contribute to the public debate on foreign policy.