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THE US VIEW OF SOUTH AFRICA

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This is a transcription of an address given at the
South African Institute of International Affairs on 12 October 1996.
He visited South Africa during his Five-Nation tour of Africa.

I want to thank the South Africa Institute for International Affairs for hosting me and for your work in raising the awareness of global issues in this country.

For some time now, Americans have been coming to South Africa to celebrate with you the end of apartheid. That has been our great privilege, and it is mine, too. But we have new work to do. The victory of freedom has opened new challenges for your people. It has also opened an opportunity that our nations must grasp: the opportunity to act together to advance common interests in Africa and around the world. That is why today I want to speak about America's engagement on this continent and to explain why peace, democracy, and prosperity in Africa matter so much to the United States (US).

I wanted to give this speech here in South Africa because your example has inspired Americans and the world. Today, people look at South Africa and say: If this diverse, once-divided nation can be united by common values and aims, then so can any multi-ethnic nation in Africa and around the world. If South Africa can forge a community of interest with the neighbours it once fought, then any region can come together. If South Africa can elect a former political prisoner to be its President, if it can tell the truth about its past and move forward, so can any nation striving to overcome a painful legacy.

When people say that South Africa is a leader, it is not just a testament to your size and your economic might. It is a tribute to the courage, patience, and tolerance that you have shown in your remarkable recent transition. It is a tribute to the optimism you inspire in others, throughout Africa and around the world.

Today, all the nations of Africa have a chance to realise the potential that exist in their human and natural resources. This was impossible when Africa was divided by Cold War cleavages and superpower rivalries. It was impossible when most African nations stagnated under single party rule, pursuing economic policies that were based upon ideology, not experience. It was impossible when South Africa stood in opposition to its neighbours,

unable to exercise moral or political leadership.

It is possible today because all over the world, people are recognising the truth Robert Kennedy expressed here in South Africa 30 years ago: that our essential humanity can only be protected and preserved where government must answer, not just to the wealthy, not just to those of a particular religion, or a particular race, but all its people. The triumph of that democratic ideal ended the Cold War. It overcame apartheid. And in country after country, it is empowering Africans to shape their destinies.

Of course, when we talk about Africa's renewed promise, we must not gloss over the tragic problems of those nations still in crisis. Nor can we underestimate the devastation caused by poverty, environmental neglect, unsustainable population growth and disease. We also dare not overlook the persistence of human rights abuses or the continued existence of the injustices like slavery.

When we speak about Africa we must of course recognise its great diversity. But even in diversity many nations in Africa have this in common: they are at a crossroads. Many countries have ended violence, but not yet established conditions for lasting peace. Many have held elections, but not yet solidified the rule of law. Many are freeing their economies from the shackles of state control, but have not yet been able to free their people from poverty. In other words, Africa is at a fragile mid-point, the point at which good leadership, sound policies, and steady international support and engagement can make the greatest difference. That is where the opportunity lies.

All nations must co-operate, not compete, if we are going to make a positive difference in Africa's future. The time has passed when Africa could be carved into spheres of influence, or when outside powers could view whole groups of states as their private domain. Today, Africa needs the support of all its many friends, not the exclusive patronage of a few. The US will do its part, not only because it is right, but because it is in our interest to help Africa succeed.

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We need African partners in our effort to meet global challenges. African nations played a leading role in extending the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Without the support and help of democracies like South Africa and Benin, we might have lost our most important barrier against the spread of nuclear weapons. Likewise, without the nearly unanimous support of African nations, we might not have gained the UN General Assembly's approval of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

We need African partners if we are to dismantle the global networks of crime, narcotics and terror that unhappily are also gaining a foothold here. Moreover, the health and prosperity of Americans depend on preserving the global environment, and we can only do that if we are fully engaged in Africa. America, like the whole world, has an interest in preserving Africa's tropical forests, which, for example, have given us effective treatments for leukaemia and Hodgkin's Disease.

America also has a strong interest in helping Africa realise its immense and mostly untapped economic potential. As Africa's regions come together, as its nations become more stable and free, opportunities for investment and trade in Africa will only grow.

Our late Commerce Secretary, my friend Ron Brown, understood this. No one ever worked harder or with more success to broaden and diversify our trade and investment relationship with Africa, including southern Africa, which he named one of the ten top emerging markets in the world. We are carrying on Ron's work. US trade with sub-Saharan Africa grew by 12% last year. Our exports already exceed those to the entire former Soviet Union. Here in South Africa, our Ambassador has told me that almost one new American company is starting or expanding its operations every week. And I want to pay tribute to our Ambassador Jim Joseph who is here with me today and who is doing such a fine job in representing his country in this country he loves so much, South Africa.

We also recognise our interest in helping Africa resolve the conflicts that stand in the way of a better future. Crisis after crisis has taught us that the cost of prevention is never as great as the price of neglect, that lifting lives is even more rewarding than saving lives. The American people have always responded with generosity when a humanitarian emergency sears our conscience. But together if we succeed in being peace-makers and democracy-builders, we will not be called upon to provide emergency relief quite so often, and that is surely America's interest as well as Africa's.

For all these reasons, President Clinton is determined to intensify American engagement in Africa. In the last four years, in a tough budgetary climate, he has sought to protect our assistance to Africa, even as aid to other regions declined sharply. We have provided US\$600 million to support South Africa's transition to democracy. We have helped nations like Mali and Benin consolidate democracy. We launched an initiative to prevent conflict

and achieve food security in the Greater Horn of Africa. We have been deeply engaged in support of peace in Mozambique and Angola. Our armed forces provided critical support for relief in Rwanda and they helped save hundreds of thousands of lives in Somalia. We are the world's leading supporter of eliminating landmines in Africa, a cause that I think the world is finally awakening to.

I would certainly not be here today and pretend to you that there is no debate in America about the relative importance of Africa. But my travel in Africa this past week has only strengthened my conviction that America must stay engaged on this continent. These experiences are ones that I can build upon as I return home and draw on the lessons that I have seen here to make that case to the American people. We cannot and we will not walk away from Africa.

Our approach to Africa is to promote democracy, to prevent conflict, to encourage economic prosperity and integration and to support sustainable development. These fundamental elements are inseparable. Political freedom is the key to peace within nations. Economies perform best where people are free to shape their own destiny. But democracy itself cannot thrive in nations divided by armed conflict or crippled by dwindling natural resources. I want to discuss each of these elements in turn.

The first is to promote democratic government, human rights and the rule of law. I can remember when apologists for colonialism argued that Africa was not developed enough to be ready for democracy. Sadly, many African leaders have used the same excuse to justify dictatorship. But now the tide is turning. Since 1989, more than 20 nations have embraced democratic government, rejecting what Mali's President Konare has condemned as the logic of 'shut-up and obey'.

The rising tide of democracy means that Africans are finally gaining a chance to solve problems and to shape their own future. In Southern Africa, drought has not led to catastrophe in part because most governments in this region are held accountable by their voters and by a free press. Democracy makes it more likely that internal divisions will be settled peacefully at the ballot box. That has been possible in emerging democracies like Mozambique and Namibia, and certainly it's been impossible in dictatorships such as Sudan. Democracy makes it more likely that business people will invest, because they will have more confidence that the law will protect their investments.

Of course, democracy here in Africa means more than just elections. It means a free press, independent courts, and a public culture in which every person can participate fully in political and community life. In the last four years, American assistance has helped women's groups get involved in politics, helped human rights advocates gain a voice, and defended independent journalists. We support institutions that establish accountability for past abuses,

like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This morning I had the honour and pleasure to sign an agreement on behalf of the US that provides US\$400,000 for the Commission's work, and had the inspiration of being both with President Mandela and Archbishop Tutu. To mention another example, the US is the world's leading supporter of the Rwanda War Crimes Tribunal.

Former President Soglo of Benin certainly had it right that Africa can't afford to be held to a lesser democratic standard by the world. Nigeria's oppressive rule is especially troubling. Nigeria should be a leader in Africa. But its rulers have squandered their nation's potential and made it the poorest oil-rich country in the world. The effects of corruption and drug trafficking in Nigeria can already be felt from South Africa to North America. The US hopes that the Nigerian government will move forward with political and economic reform. We are open to dialogue with the leaders of Nigeria. But we are prepared to take appropriate steps if repression continues.

When democracy is threatened, its fate depends in part on the will of other nations in the region to defend it. Already, many African leaders have recognised that national boundaries must not shield abuses that threaten whole regions. As I said at the OAU two days ago in Addis Ababa, by acting together African nations can effectively vindicate the principle that democracy must be safeguarded, that military coups are unacceptable, and that election results must be respected.

The second element of our approach is to work with African nations to resolve Africa's remaining armed conflicts and to prevent new ones. In Africa's Great Lakes region, our two countries are working with regional leaders to avoid renewed genocide. I was in Arusha yesterday to support the efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the crisis in Burundi. I had an opportunity to discuss this issue with President Mandela this morning and found that we fully share the goal of achieving an agreement that will restore democracy and protect minority rights. In Angola, which I will visit on Monday, we are also working to resolve the war that has raged there for a generation.

Our experience in Angola has also demonstrated the essential role the United Nations can play in resolving conflict. We are determined to meet our responsibilities to the UN and we are striving to improve its effectiveness and strengthen its leadership.

Like other regions, Africa also needs strong regional and sub-regional organisations, like SADC, regional organisations that can take responsibility, in partnership with Africa's friends abroad, at moments of crisis. It needs well-trained regional forces that can be deployed rapidly when and where they are needed for humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. It needs a mechanism that combines the experience of Africa's armed forces with the resources and capabilities of its non-African partners.

To meet this need, we are working with our partners in

Africa and around the world to create something that we're calling the African Crisis Response Force. This concept is not new, but it certainly is necessary. It allows us to realise a goal that the OAU has espoused and other nations have long shared: a goal of building Africa's capacity for resolving conflict - just as we have done in many other regions of the world.

The crisis in Burundi adds urgency to this effort. It makes it highly important that we urgently explore the creation of such a crisis force. But in addition to Burundi, it could meet Africa's long-term needs as well. It could face again a choice between acting alone at times of crisis or doing nothing. I am happy to say that a number of African nations have already expressed their willingness to contribute to such a force. Based on the results of my trip, I am increasingly confident that an African Crisis Response Force can, indeed, and will be created.

The third element of our approach is to help Africa realise its economic potential. Many countries in Africa have acted to reduce budget deficits, to privatise enterprises and to deregulate economies. These are very hard and painful steps - in Africa and everywhere else in the world. But they are the only path to sustained growth and rising living standards.

The US strongly supports the efforts of the international financial institutions to help African nations succeed on this path, and President Clinton is seeking adequate funding for this work. We also helped to forge the consensus donor nations reached last month to relieve more of the debt being held by the world's poorest countries.

We applaud the World Bank's greater focus on education because education is critical to economic development. There is no good reason why the donor community and African countries cannot work together to help every child in every country benefit from at least a full primary education by the year 2010. Development also depends on unleashing the talents of all of Africa's people. Africa's women, in particular, must gain full access to every school, clinic, and parliament if the continent is to succeed to tap its full potential.

The US also strongly supports the new measures that the World Bank and IMF will be taking against corruption around the world. The private sector can only thrive when ordinary citizens are not forced to pay bribes when contracts are fairly and freely awarded, and foreign investors are not intimidated. Fighting this corruption is a global challenge. It is also an African challenge. We are encouraged by the priority that African democracies like Tanzania are giving to rooting out these corrosive business practices.

We should also work together to help African become more integrated with the global economy. Thirty-two sub-Saharan African nations have joined the new World Trade Organisation, and we are helping them to share its benefits and membership as well as to meet its

requirements. In this region, SADC is eliminating duties and non-tariff barriers. We encourage it to work with its counterparts in East and West Africa to liberalise trade throughout the continent.

The final element of our approach is to overcome the transnational problems that undermine democracy, peace and prosperity. African nations will prosper only if their economies grow faster than their population. Africa's economies will only grow if they manage wisely the forests, grasslands, waters and wildlife that are fundamental to every industry from agriculture to tourism to manufacturing.

When some people look at the social and environmental pressures your continent faces, they predict anarchy and chaos. They think violence is the inevitable consequence of environmental decay, disease, and population growth. These forces are, to be sure, destructive. But I believe that human neglect and unaccountable government are the most important causes of the human disasters we have seen in countries like Liberia. Genocide is not a natural disaster.

I am convinced, as President John Kennedy once said, that problems created by man can be solved by man. During my trip this week, I have been inspired by the men and women I met who are struggling to meet Africa's greatest challenges and succeeding. Thanks to them, infant survival rates, life expectancy and literacy are finally on the rise. Thanks to them, a higher portion of Africa's lands are set aside for protection than anywhere in the world.

The US stands with them. Here, our Agency for International Development is placing particular emphasis on sustainable development. When I was in Addis earlier this week, I visited a community where we are working with local people to pave streets, fix bridges and create economic opportunity.

When I was in Mali, I visited our young Peace Corps volunteers, who are working with villagers to plant trees and to keep drinking water safe in an area threatened by the desert and it is really fascinating and heroic to watch them at work. Any American who saw what I saw this week would be proud of our country's role on this continent and just as determined as I am to preserve it.

The goals I have talked about - democracy, peace, prosperity and sustainable development - are goals I know the US and South Africa share. I also know that South Africa faces great challenges at home - from the old quest to assure justice and opportunity for all, to the new urgency of fighting crime and narcotics. The most important thing South Africa can do for Africa and the world is to ensure that its own transformation here at home succeeds. We remain optimistic about the future of South Africa, its economy and about South Africa's leadership. But I know you do not believe your responsibility here in South Africa ends at home.

South Africa has already made great progress in promoting regional co-operation and peace in Southern Africa. SADC

has been a tremendous success and under President Mandela's leadership it will only grow stronger. But your national interest does not end with this region. After all, no one wants the nations that we once called the front line states to find themselves on a new front line, facing instability and poverty to the north. That is why we applaud President Mandela's courageous leadership on human rights and South Africa's growing engagement in the OAU.

South Africa is an important global partner for the US, too. Your nation has provided decisive leadership against nuclear proliferation not once but many times. We share an interest in fighting terrorism, drugs and crime and protecting the global environment. The Binational Commission chaired by Deputy President [Thabo] Mbeki and Vice President [Al] Gore has already put many of these practical issues on our common agenda and we're working hard together on these issues.

When I look around the world, I see very few countries with greater potential to help shape the 21st century than the new South Africa. I see few relationships as vital to advancing our common interests as the US-South African relationship.

Our nations are linked by so much shared history, so many shared values and so many shared aspirations. You have struggled to become what Bishop Tutu calls the rainbow people of God. In America, we have struggled, in the words of Martin Luther King, to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. Despite all of our remaining problems, our examples here in South Africa and the US still inspire the world. Nations look to us to exercise principled leadership. Let us continue to heed their call.

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.