



**AFRICA'S SECURITY AND THE UNITED STATES:  
LETTERS FROM AFRICA TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN**

**Kwesi Aning and Afua Lamptey**

**January, 2021**

To His Excellency Joe Biden,  
President of the United States,  
The White House.

Dear President Biden,

Allow us to congratulate you on your impressive victory in the November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 elections in the United States of America (U.S.A). Indeed, your campaign, and the aftermath of the elections have been truly unprecedented, especially amidst the raging COVID-19 pandemic. Your win of 81.2 million votes is also truly historic as it represents the highest number of votes cast for an American president.



*Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden speaks during a campaign rally in Detroit. Credit: Paul Sancya/AP*



It has become imperative for us to write to you before you are formally sworn-in and to raise some critical issues that we hope your administration will consider during your presidency with respect to U.S. – Africa relations. During the campaign period, Africa unfortunately did not feature prominently, if at all, in the issues that were discussed and debated, though we are of the view that Africa does matter on its own merit, as it has the advantage of a youthful population, rapidly expanding middle class as well as significant resources and markets.

Mr. President, as you are aware, the US has great influence and enormous appeal globally. It has led and set the pace for many multilateral engagements on issues such as climate change, trade and global peace and security. The campaign and subsequent election of President Donald Trump four years ago therefore came as a surprise to the international community for two reasons. First, his “make America great again” nationalistic rhetoric stood against over two centuries of multilateralism. Second, it represented a growing polarization in American society.

Your election as president especially with your Vice-President Kamala Harris has received wide acclaim globally as many people hope for a return to a world with American leadership or active participation in the global agenda setting. Africa in particular waits expectantly to re-engage America for our mutual benefit.

Though your campaign did not focus much on the African continent considering the tumultuous domestic environment, we are nonetheless hopeful that Africa will once again feature prominently in US foreign policy once your tenure of office begins.

Mr. President, prior to the fairly recent recognition of Africa's role in the global realignment in politics, trade and international cooperation, the continent did not feature much in global politics and US foreign policy was focused on benign neglect at best. America's policy towards Africa has also been shaped, not only by circumstance and ideology but also by the successive President's personality. U.S national interests have of course been paramount in all these policies. US-Africa relations deepened during

the Clinton administration and subsequently, there has been continuity under subsequent presidents. While President Clinton focused on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), President Bush implemented the Presidents' Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). President Barack Obama's Power Africa policies were geared towards strengthening democratic institutions in African states for which there have been appreciable successes, economic engagements to ensure progress, support for health-related issues, and especially as you may remember the fight against the Ebola Viral Disease (EVD).

**Joe Biden's election has created renewed hope of U.S. re-engagement with Africa as a partner for trade, development and security.**

**U.S.'s unilateral approach of bypassing multilateral channels to engage directly with nations they perceived worthy of their attention undermined international consensus building relating to critical African issues.**

The Trump administration took more of a unilateral approach to its African interventions. This was mainly done through trade negotiations with individual countries on the continent, with countries like Morocco and Kenya. Further, President Trump's "Prosper Africa strategy" unveiled by national security advisor John Bolton in 2018, centered on advancing US trade and commercial ties with nations across the region, countering threats from radical Islamic terrorism and violent conflicts and third, ensuring the efficient and effective use of US Aid. The US appeared more interested in eroding the gains made by China and Russia on the continent, criticizing their approaches and in effect casting slurs on African states who engaged with them. Such unilateralism which resulted in bypassing multilateral channels to engage directly with nations they found worthy of their attention undermined international consensus building relating to critical global and especially African issues.

Mr. President, below we identify some key areas of critical importance which your Presidency should consider as a matter of necessity in the larger interest of peace and security, and especially in terms of critical areas of partnership as your administration seeks to heal America and make it once again an active leader and participant in global affairs.

### *Africa beyond Aid*

Mr. President, the African continent has historically received aid from the US since independence. Undoubtedly, different foreign aid programs have supported various sectors in Africa particularly in the areas of health and especially during the 2018 Ebola pandemic. However, the continued dependence on aid threatens the continent's independence and overall developmental growth. As your administration embarks on recalibrating US's foreign policy towards Africa, it must necessarily be Afro-centric, prioritizing the needs and concerns of the continent's peoples. Needless to say, this has mutually beneficial rewards for both the United States and Africa as the focus is more on partnerships than paternalism. Such partnerships have the potential to address structural issues that continue to bedevil Africa's growth such as poverty, unemployment, lack of infrastructural developments among other pertinent issues.

**U.S. engagement in Africa should focus on harnessing Africa's trade and investment potentials available through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.**

Public-private partnerships between U.S. corporations and Africa's public and private sectors also ensures accountability and transparent use of funds. Ultimately, it will reduce violence by decreasing some of the conflict triggers mentioned above. Furthermore, policies that focus on investing in Africa and harnessing its potentials through

such available opportunities offered by the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africa Development Bank (ABD) and other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) becomes critical. As AGOA expires in 2025, it would be beneficial to explore how it can be strengthened and improved to maximize its operational utility to both parties. Understandably, these are long-term investments which may not seem to, at first glance, yield short-term benefits as the U.S. seeks to boost its resources spent in Africa. However, in the long-term, such investments will be more beneficial to all than any ad hoc approaches.

Mr. President,

*Supporting the fight against Maritime Piracy and Transnational Organised Crime*

Piracy and armed robbery at sea continues to stall development and overall maritime security along the Gulf of Aden and more specifically the Gulf of Guinea (stretching from West to Central Africa), threatening economies and livelihoods at sea and land alike. These two busy international shipping routes have become vulnerable to piracy attacks and armed robbery at sea among a host of other maritime crimes. Particularly along the coastline of West and Central Africa, these threats have earned the region the notorious tag of the world's most dangerous waters. In spite of this, the U.S. has substantial trade interests in the region. For instance, in 2019, the US imported \$4.4 billion worth of crude oil from Nigeria which represents 3.3% of its total imports and makes Nigeria the 6<sup>th</sup> largest supplier of crude oil to the US. Supporting efforts to counter piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea through frameworks such as the Yaoundé Architecture will ensure that states are able to build their capacities to reduce these threats.

This is especially important as there are tangible fears of terrorists in the Sahel region gaining a foothold in coastal countries to expand their illicit activities. Mr. President, we are cognizant of, and commend U.S. efforts at improving regional cooperation, maritime domain awareness, and information-sharing practices to enhance the collective capabilities of African states through Exercise Obangame Express. However, we believe this partnership needs to be broadened to include all the relevant actors under the Yaoundé process. This support will also have to take into consideration the effects of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea, which is a theft from national revenues. West Africa alone loses \$1.3 billion per year due to illegal fishing. Apart from draining the region of revenue, overfishing reduces fish stocks, lowers local catches and harms the marine environment. It also destroys communities, who lose opportunities to catch, process and trade fish. Maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea impact regional economies and stability as they inhibit utilisation of the marine domain undermining efforts to develop the blue economy.

*Investing in Climate Change*

Mr President, climate and health concerns are priorities necessary to sustain the planet and also human life. Climate change including rising temperatures, extreme weather events, shifting wildlife populations and habitats, rising sea levels and also droughts and drying waterbeds particularly in Africa have become the norm.

**The Lake Chad, which serves over 30 million people, has dramatically diminished in size by 90 percent since the 1960s, exacerbating conflicts between herders and farmers whose livelihoods have been negatively impacted.**

For instance, Lake Chad, one of the African continent's largest bodies of fresh water, which serves the over 30 million people living around it, has dramatically decreased in size due to climate change and human demand for water. It is located at the intersection of Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon and has diminished by 90 percent since the 1960s. This has increased conflict between herders and farmers as livelihoods have been lost. Undoubtedly, the role of climate change as a result of greenhouse gases being added to the atmosphere cannot be overemphasized. The US and China alone produce more than 40 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions globally. That is why it is important that the US gets back on track in reducing its fossil footprints which cumulatively contributes to changes in the climate affecting all of humanity. Having championed climate change as one of your major campaign issues, we are hopeful that you will redeem your promise of re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement as a matter of global necessity and a mark of U.S. global leadership. But we also believe the U.S. can do more by supporting African capacity for green energy production, while taking a tougher stand on U.S. domestic green-house emissions and tracking.

### *Reducing the effects of Pandemics*

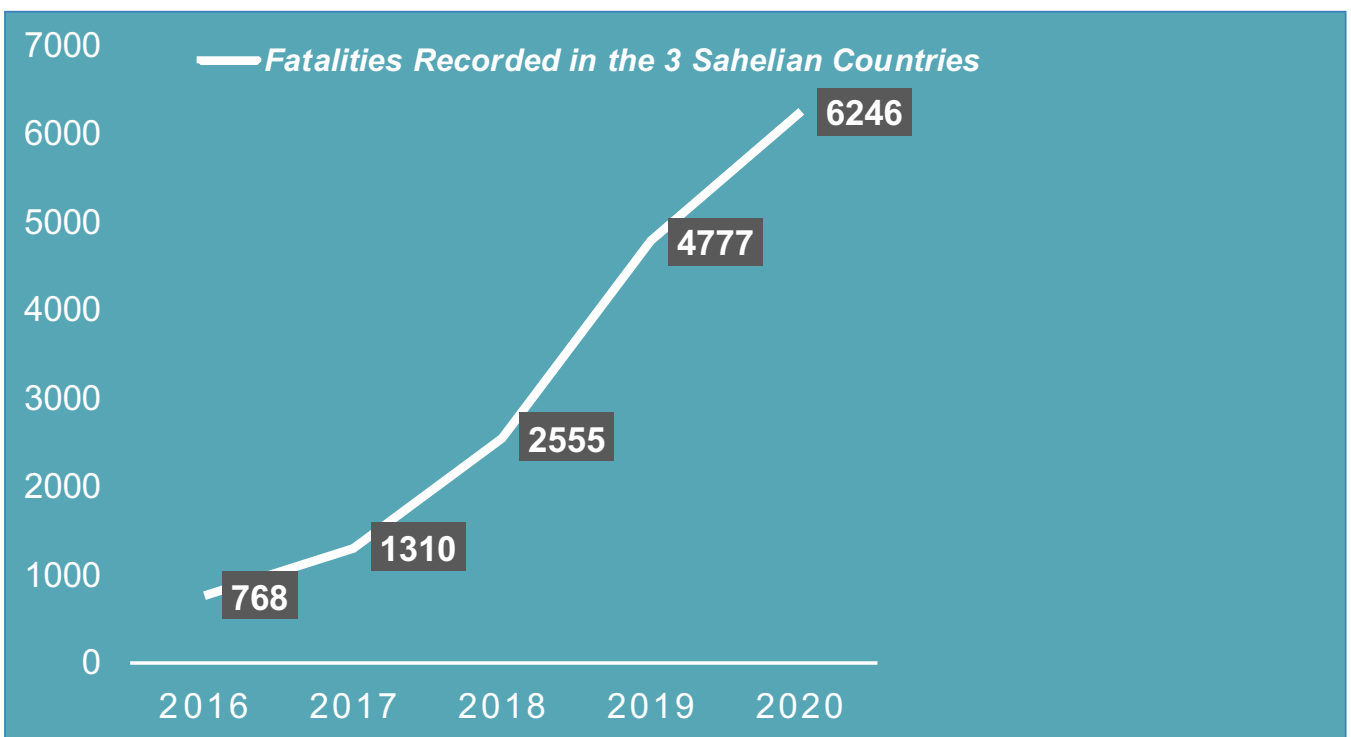
The ravages of COVID-19 pandemic indicates that more efforts must be placed on preventing and reducing the spread of such deadly viruses. Continued U.S. support to organizations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) is critical to promoting health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. Africa hosts large vulnerable populations, and the WHO's role is instrumental in supporting public health initiatives such as combating HIV/AIDSs, malnutrition, malaria and Polio eradication. Continued support to the WHO thus ensures collective human health and security for all. U.S.'s leadership in post COVID-19 recovery efforts could see a partnership with Africa to reduce increase in social uprising due to economic hardships, corruption and unemployment. Such partnerships will allow especially Africa's young populations to stay in Africa and avoid the perilous illegal migration to the U.S. and Europe. Therefore, investing in post COVID-19 relief efforts will inure to the mutual benefits of both partners. We also believe that more efforts could be geared at improving the weak health infrastructure and strengthening scientific research institutions of many African countries to enable them withstand future pandemics.

### *Fighting terrorism, extremism, and instability*

**In 2020 alone, more than 6000 fatalities were recorded by the United Nations in the three Sahelian countries of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.**

Mr. President,

There is an increase in extremist or militant attacks in the Sahel region in particular with indiscriminate targeting of civilian and security personnel. Violent extremist activity in the Sahel has doubled every year since 2016. In 2020 alone, more than 6000 fatalities were recorded by the United Nations in the three Sahelian countries of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, representing more than an eight-fold increase over 2016 figures. The formation of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims or Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) in March 2017, changed the dynamics of violent extremism in the Sahel. Emerging from an alliance between Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the JNIM has rapidly expanded its activities from Mali to Niger and Burkina Faso, with the current geographic focus shifting to Burkina Faso and the coastal West African states.



*Extremism-related fatalities recorded in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger over a 5-year period. Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*

Since March 2020, there has been unprecedented terrorist violence in the Sahel and West Africa which have shaken public confidence. Instability in West African sub-region have also complicated the already blurred lines between extremism, organized crime and intercommunal violence. Further, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin are diverse. Extremist groups' patterns of violence,

cross border movements and strategic strikes have contributed to an exacerbation of negative displacement trends in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. There is credible intelligence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) carrying out recruitment missions across the lake Chad Basin Region. Further, the al-Qaeda JNIM based in Mali has also increased its cross-border operations.





Thousands of people, mainly women and children, are scattered across the arid land of Nguigimi, Niger, after fleeing Boko Haram violence in Nigeria. Credit: WFP Niger/Vigno Hounkanli

In Nigeria, Boko Haram continues to wage a deadly campaign with huge humanitarian costs. Whereas in Somalia, the activities of the al-Shabab is a growing source of concern. Insurgency perpetrated by extremists with Islamic State allegiances in Mozambique's isolated northern regions where over the past two years, more than 200,000 people have been displaced with 900 deaths is also becoming worrying. These threats are transnational and have the potential to be exported to Europe and the U.S. Additionally, with the varied U.S. interests in Africa, partnering Africa and enhancing capacities to keep Africa safe is also good for U.S. interests. U.S. leadership through the Security Council in supporting robust interventions in troubled spots is very much appreciated and could be accelerated. Support for democratic principles on the continent will help in the long run considering current trends of democratic reversals and the potential instability that will be generated in the next 5 to 10 years.

**Support for democratic principles on the continent will help reduce violent conflicts and promote stability.**

Mr. President, it is important that as your incoming administration seeks to re-calibrate U.S. security and economic policies, special emphasis should be placed on addressing the issues listed above. We look forward to improved collaboration with Africa as a strategic partner in

global affairs and wish you a successful Presidency in the coming years.

Yours,

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**Cover photo: U.S. President Joe Biden delivers remarks in Wilmington, Delaware. Credit: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images**

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## About the Centre

Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC) is an internationally preferred centre of excellence for research into training for conflict prevention, management and resolution, research and innovative thinking in integrated peace support operations and sustainable delivery of enhanced regional capacity building for peace support operations.

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