

Vital Partners, Shared Priorities: The Biden Administration's Sub-Saharan Africa Strategy

SPEECH

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SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, everyone. It's wonderful to be here, wonderful to be at this extraordinary university. To Professor Maharaj, to the entire leadership of the University of Pretoria, thank you for hosting us today on this magnificent campus.

And Madam Minister, my friend Naledi, thank you that generous introduction. But thank you especially for the partnership that we've been building, not just between our countries but actually between ourselves, something I value tremendously. And I thank you for it.

Let me just take a moment at the start also to welcome someone else, our ambassador-designate to South Africa, Reuben Brigety, who will present his credentials to President Ramaphosa this week. Reuben, where are you? (Applause.)

Reuben previously served as the U.S. ambassador to the African Union, among other senior posts in our government, as well as president and dean of multiple universities. I can't imagine a better steward of the relationship between our nations.

For me, it is, simply put, wonderful to be back in South Africa. I've actually had the privilege of visiting several times before, including with President Clinton, President Obama, and then-Vice President Biden. And the impressions from those visits are very much seared into my own memory.

Seeing President Clinton become the first U.S. president to address your parliament, joined by a delegation from our Congressional Black Caucus, many of whom were stalwart supporters of the anti-apartheid movement and who represent part of the vast African diaspora that enriches our nations' ties.

Seeing our first black president, the son of a Kenyan father and an American mother, stand in the two-by-two-meter cell on Robben Island that once jailed South Africa's first black president.

Or hearing the buzz of the vuvuzelas as the U.S. men's team played the first World Cup ever held in Africa. So some of these sounds can never be unheard, and some early eliminations still hurt. (Laughter.) But hope springs eternal.

Today, as the minister said, I have the honor of setting out our government's new strategy for the partnership between sub-Saharan Africa and the United States. It's a strategy that builds on the broad vision for our nation's engagement of the region, which I had an opportunity to share last November in Nigeria.

And it is fitting to set out the strategy here, on the Future Africa campus, an institution whose mission is bringing together people from different disciplines, backgrounds, and nationalities to tackle some of the most vexing challenges of our time.

Our future depends on young people like the scholars and practitioners who come here to study. And, as you've heard, by 2050, one in four people on the planet we share will be African. They will shape the destiny not only of this continent but of the world.

It's also fitting because South Africa's struggle for freedom, and the courage and sacrifices of those who led it, continues to inspire people around the world. We

know that in your nation, like ours, the long walk to freedom is unfinished. Yet the remarkable progress you've made is all around us.

In 1956, 156 activists were rounded up for rallying support for the Freedom Charter, a document that had the audacity to claim that South Africa belonged to its people. When the Treason Trial began here in Pretoria, the accused included one of the charter's drafters, Professor Z.K. Matthews, and a rising ANC activist, Joe Matthews – father and son, and grandfather and father to the woman who today serves as South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr. Naledi Pandor. (Applause.)

And maybe just as important for this audience, that "Doctor" before the minister's name was earned here at the University of Pretoria.

We see that progress also in the achievements of your fellow South Africans – the recent triumphs of the women of Banyana Banyana, the men of the Springboks. (Applause.) The enduring musical influences of Makeba and Masekela, the new sway of the Amapiano and DJs like – (applause) – there you go – DJs like Black Coffee, who just took home a Grammy.

Finally, it's fitting to set out our strategy here in South Africa because there is such a deep bond between our nations and people, and all we have in common as vibrant democracies whose diversity remains our greatest strength.

Our strategy is rooted in the recognition that sub-Saharan Africa is a major geopolitical force, one that shaped our past, is shaping our present, and will shape our future.

It's a strategy that reflects the region's complexity – its diversity, its power and influence – and one that focuses on what we will do with African nations and peoples, not for African nations and peoples.

Put simply, the United States and African nations can't achieve any of our shared priorities, whether that's recovering from the pandemic, creating broad-based economic opportunity, addressing the climate crisis, expanding energy access,

revitalizing democracies, strengthening the free and open international order – we can't do any of that if we don't work together as equal partners.

So today I'd like to focus on four priorities that we believe we have to tackle together which are at the heart of the U.S. strategy for sub-Saharan Africa.

First, we will foster openness, by which we mean the capacity of individuals, communities, and nations to choose their own path and shape the world we live in.

When leaders of newly independent African nations came together in 1963 to establish the Organization of African Unity, the predecessor to the African Union, here's how they began their charter: "Convinced that it is the inalienable right of all people to control their own destiny."

It was a conviction born of the struggle of generations of Africans whose destiny had been determined by colonial powers. This inalienable right depends on a system of rules and principles which Africans have helped forge over decades through their leadership in institutions like the United Nations and the African Union.

And yet too often African nations have been treated as instruments of other nations' progress rather than the authors of their own. Time and again they have been told to pick a side in great power contests that feel far removed from daily struggles of their people.

The United States will not dictate Africa's choices. Neither should anyone else. The right to make these choices belongs to Africans, and Africans alone.

At the same time, the United States and the world will look to African nations to defend the rules of the international system that they've done so much to shape. These include the right of every country to have its independence, its sovereignty, its territorial integrity respected, a principle at stake now in Ukraine.

We believe that all nations should be able to stand up for the right of a country not to have its borders redrawn by force, for if we allow that principle to be violated anywhere, we weaken it everywhere.

Openness also means creating pathways for the free flow of ideas, information, investment, which in the 21st century requires digital connectivity. So the United States is partnering with African governments, businesses, entrepreneurs to build and adapt the infrastructure that enables that connectivity – an open, reliable, interoperable, secure internet; data centers; cloud computing.

That's what happened in March, when Mozambique became the first African country to license SpaceX's Starlink technology. That uses satellites to provide internet service, and it's going to help expand access and lower costs for people throughout the country's rural areas.

Now, one reason internet service is so spotty in places like Mozambique is because providers rely on data centers that are hundreds or even thousands of kilometers away. We're working with African countries and businesses to change that.

The U.S. Development Finance Corporation is putting \$300 million in financing toward developing, building, and operating data centers across the region, including here in South Africa.

We recently awarded a \$600 million contract to build an undersea telecommunications cable that will stretch over 17,000 kilometers – from Southeast Asia through the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, to Europe – delivering high-speed, reliable, secure connections for people across the continents.

The way this infrastructure is built will reverberate for decades. After all, we've seen the consequences when international infrastructure deals are corrupt and coercive, when they're poorly built or environmentally destructive, when they import or abuse workers, or burden countries with crushing debts.

That's why it's so important for countries to have choices, to be able to weigh them transparently, with the input of local communities without pressure or coercion.

Now, for as long as they've had their independence, African countries have also recognized that the right of nations to chart their own path is bound up in ensuring the right of individual citizens to do the same thing.

So this brings me to our second priority: working with African partners to fulfill the promise of democracy.

The overwhelming majority of people across Africa prefer democracy to any other form of government. Even greater majorities oppose the authoritarian alternatives to democracy. More than 70 percent reject military rule; more than 80 percent reject one-man rule, according to the Africa-based polling organization Afrobarometer.

African citizens want democracy – that is clear. The question – the question is whether African governments can make democracy deliver by improving the lives of their citizens in tangible ways. That is a challenge that is not unique to Africa. It's one facing democracies in every part of the world, including the United States. And it's a problem that won't be fixed by maintaining the same approach.

So here's what we'll do differently. We won't treat democracy as an area where Africa has problems and the United States has solutions. We recognize that our democracies face common challenges, which we need to tackle together, as equals, alongside other governments, civil society, and citizens.

That was the spirit that animated the 100 countries that came together for the Summit for Democracy President Biden hosted last December. It will drive the African Leaders Summit that the United States will host this December for the first time since 2014 – providing an opportunity to build greater momentum around tackling shared priorities.

We will work with partners to tackle 21st century threats to democracy like misinformation, digital surveillance, weaponized corruption. We'll launch a novel approach to good governance, the Global Fragility Act, which will make a decade-long investment in promoting more peaceful, more inclusive, more resilient

societies in places where conditions are ripe for conflict, including Mozambique – which we spoke about today – the Coastal West African countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Togo.

In each of these places, we're starting by asking our local partners where our help can make the biggest difference. And we're drawing on decades of lessons learned in conflict prevention, such as cultivating relationships between community leaders, government officials, and security forces, which are vital to defusing tensions before they erupt into violence; and building resilience to the destabilizing impacts of climate change, like more frequent, more severe droughts.

Thanks to bipartisan support in the United States Congress, this initiative can count on \$200 million a year in funding – every year, for 10 years. That's the kind of horizon that will allow us to look beyond quick fixes.

We'll focus on the connection between democracy and security. History shows that strong democracies tend to be more stable and less prone to conflict – and that poor governance, exclusion, and corruption inherent in weak democracies makes them more vulnerable to extremist movements as well as to foreign interference. That includes the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, which exploits instability to pillage resources and commit abuses with impunity, as we've seen in Mali and the Central African Republic.

The United States recognizes that African countries face real security concerns, and that countless communities are afflicted by the twin scourges of terrorism and violence. But the answer to those problems is not Wagner, it's not any other mercenary group. The answer is working to build more effective, accountable African security forces, which respect people's rights, and tackling the marginalization that often drives people to criminal or extremist groups. The answer is sustained diplomacy to end violence and open paths to peace – diplomacy that's increasingly being led by African leaders, regional organizations, and citizens.

African countries can count on the United States to support these efforts, as we've demonstrated through our engagement in places like Chad, Ethiopia, Sudan, eastern DRC, which is a key focus of my visit this week.

Finally, the answer is peaceful transitions of power, through free and fair elections. African leaders are increasingly underscoring the importance of these transitions to regional security and prosperity. That includes ECOWAS, which is debating whether its 15 member nations should adopt a ban on presidents seeking a third term. Among the most outspoken proponents of the ban are the presidents of Ghana and Nigeria, both of whom are in their second term.

Tomorrow, Kenyans will elect a new leader, and Angolans will follow suit later this month. In 2023, the peoples of DRC, Nigeria, and Senegal will all go to the polls. Every one of these elections is an opportunity for African citizens and nations to reaffirm that leaders are accountable to their people, and strengthen the case for democracy in the region and around the world.

Third, we'll work together to recover from the devastation wrought by COVID-19 and lay the foundation for broad-based, sustainable economic opportunity to improve the lives of our people.

We know the pandemic has dealt a devastating blow to Africa – lives lost, livelihoods shattered. More than 55 million Africans have been driven into poverty by the pandemic, setting back decades of hard-earned progress. The economic pain has been deepened by Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine.

Even before President Putin launched his full invasion, 193 million people worldwide were in need of humanitarian food assistance. The World Bank believes that Russia's invasion could add another 40 million people to this unprecedented number. Most are in Africa.

The United States is there for African countries in this unprecedented crisis, because that's what partners do for each other, and because helping Africans

jumpstart a broad-based recovery and build resilience to weather future shocks is vital to our shared prosperity.

So let me briefly share how we're doing that. We're rallying other countries and international institutions to step up on key challenges, like debt relief. Together with South Africa and other members of the G20, we helped develop a Common Framework for Debt Relief, bringing in China and other creditors for the very first time. For Zambia, this collective commitment is poised to unlock \$1.4 billion in an IMF program designed to help the country return to a stable economic path and foster more resilient, inclusive growth for the Zambian people.

We're also providing life-saving support. Since the beginning of the year, the United States has sent more than \$6.6 billion in humanitarian and food assistance to Africa.

A couple of months ago, in May, I brought together a Global Food Security Ministerial meeting at the United Nations to try to rally donors to close some of the urgent funding gaps and allow affected countries to highlight the areas where they need support. Our African colleagues made clear that, beyond emergency relief, what they really want is more investment in agricultural resilience, innovation, self-sufficiency. We're responding to those calls.

Our initiative called Feed the Future will invest \$11 billion over five years in 20 partner countries, 16 of which are in Africa. And a new initiative we launched with the United Arab Emirates is turbo-charging investment and innovation in climate smart agriculture.

Now, it's not just agriculture. Across a range of fields, the United States is working with African partners to try to unlock innovation and growth. As we do, we're building on African-led initiatives, such as the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, which, when fully implemented will comprise the fifth largest economic bloc in the world, and also the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Now think about infrastructure for a minute. At the G7 meeting just recently held, President Biden led in launching the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which will mobilize \$600 billion globally toward concrete projects over the next five years. The United States is committed to raising \$200 billion towards this effort, and we're already implementing projects that are focused on health, on digital infrastructure, empowering women and girls, energy, and climate.

Consider youth. Yesterday, I met with alumni of the Mandela Washington Fellowship. Since President Obama launched the program eight years ago, more than 5,000 rising leaders from every country in Sub-Saharan Africa have come to the United States for academic and leadership training – building skills and, as important, relationships that will last a lifetime. The broader YALI Network, which provides tools, resources, a virtual community for young African leaders, now has more than 700,000 members.

Consider what we're doing in health. In 2003, President George W. Bush created PEPFAR to make a transformational investment in HIV prevention, detection, treatment, and care. It's one of the greatest initiatives, I think, the United States has undertaken in my lifetime. Since that time, we've invested over \$100 billion in the effort, nearly all of it in partners in Sub-Saharan Africa. Together, we have saved the lives of an estimated 21 million people. We prevented millions more infections, including five and a half million babies born HIV-free.

Now, think about that for a second. These are big numbers, and we have – we talk about numbers, and it sometimes defies us really understanding what it's all about. Each of these numbers is an individual life, an individual destiny, an individual story. And thanks to this incredible work, those stories have continued, and they're going to contribute so much to the world that we share.

Today, PEPFAR supports 70,000 health clinics, 3,000 laboratories, 300,000 health workers, and countless DREAMS ambassadors, who help keep adolescent girls and young women safe from HIV, including, I think, some who are with us today in this audience.

These efforts are making a lasting difference in the lives of millions of Africans. That's what we've seen during the pandemic, when, in addition to providing more than 170 million doses of safe, effective COVID vaccines to African countries – free of charge and with more to come – the health systems we've built together over decades have saved countless lives. Clinics that we've built together have tended to people with the most severe COVID cases. Community health workers we helped train have gone door to door, getting jabs into arms. Research partnerships that we've co-developed have led to breakthroughs in identifying new variants of COVID and treatments.

Meanwhile, our partnerships with national and regional health institutions – like the Africa CDC – have helped detect and respond to new outbreaks like our recent collaboration with Ghana to contain that country's first case of Marburg disease.

And where the pandemic has also exposed gaps, we're working to address them together.

Back in February, I brought together foreign ministers from 40 countries – including Minister Pandor – as well as multilateral bodies like the African Union. We put together a Global Action Plan that defines key priorities, like ensuring more equitable distribution of vaccines, and we set concrete targets. Then we divided up responsibility among our nations to meet those targets, drawing on our complementary strengths. And we're getting together regularly to make sure that we're tracking our progress.

Together with South Africa, Indonesia, and other G20 members, we also stood up a historic new fund at the World Bank and the World Health Organization for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. This will be critical in providing sustainable support to strengthen the health security of countries and regions in need and break the cycle of crisis and neglect. We go through this every time: major crisis; we rally; we mobilize; the crisis is over; we go back to business as usual. We can't afford to do that, and we won't.

We've also heard the desire of African countries for vaccine self-sufficiency. We're working together to help you achieve it. In November, I visited one of the vaccine production facilities that we're helping support in Senegal. And just last month, the U.S. National Institution of Allergy and Infectious Diseases teamed up with Afrigen to share technical expertise on the development of next-generation mRNA vaccines as well as therapeutics, and that is happening right here in South Africa.

All of this collaboration is in our mutual interest, because as the pandemic has demonstrated, as long as any of us are at risk, all of us are at risk.

That brings me to the final area where our partnership is crucial: leading on clean energy transition that saves our planet, adapts to the effects of climate change, and provides energy to power economic opportunity.

The United Nations recognizes Africa as the most vulnerable region in the world to the effects of climate. Not too long ago, we had to imagine those effects. Today, we're living them. You saw it in April, when catastrophic flooding killed more than 400 people around Durban. Storms like the ones that caused those floods – they're now twice as likely to occur due to climate change, and that will only increase in frequency and intensity as the Earth continues to warm. As in the United States, the people who are already struggling are being hit the hardest.

Now, I could not agree more with the foreign minister – not all countries bear equal responsibility for this crisis. The United States has around 4 percent of the world's population; we contribute about 11 percent of global emissions, making us the second-biggest emitter after China. Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 15 percent of the world's population, produces only 3 percent of emissions. And historically, major economies like ours took steps to develop that we're now asking others to forgo because we've understood the impact on climate.

We recognize this imbalance places a greater responsibility on countries like the United States, both to reduce our own emissions, but also to help other countries make the transition to clean energy and adapt to a changing climate. That's why, at COP26, President Biden committed to work with our Congress to dedicate \$3 billion

a year to help people in the most vulnerable countries adapt to the impacts of climate change. As home to 17 of the world's 20 most climate-vulnerable countries, much of this aid will go to sub-Saharan Africa. And we will look to build on these and other efforts at COP27 in Egypt later this year.

Now, leaders across Africa have made clear that while they are committed to doing their part to reduce climate change, they need greater and more reliable energy access to meet people's urgent needs and growing needs. We hear you.

We know that this transition will not look the same in every country or community – that it will need to be tailored to individual capacities and individual circumstances. And the United States is committed to working closely with you as you determine how best to meet your specific needs for expanded energy access and economic development, as well as the climate targets that you've set. We're also committed to helping you support the workers and communities who will bear the greatest short-term costs of the shift to clean energy. All that is part and parcel of making what we call a just energy transition.

But I think it's a mistake to think about climate only through the prism of threats, burdens – or to frame this as a choice between preventing a catastrophe and creating opportunities. We have a once-in-generations opportunity to expand energy access and create opportunities – for Africans and for Americans. That's what President Biden means when he says, "When I think of climate change, I think jobs."

We're already showing how that can be done. In Ghana, we're working with partners to build West Africa's first hybrid solar-hydro plant. It's going to improve reliability, reduce costs, and cut more than 47,000 tons of emissions every year. That is the equivalent of taking about 10,000 cars off the road. In Kenya, where 90 percent of the energy comes from renewable sources, U.S. firms have invested \$570 million into off-grid energy markets, creating 40,000 green jobs.

We're also working together to conserve and restore the continent's natural ecosystems, crucial to reducing emissions and preserving the continent's unique,

extraordinary biodiversity. That means delivering real incentives for governments and communities to choose conservation over deforestation, not just pledges, because the lasting consequences of losing forests like the one in the Congo Basin – the world’s first lung – they will be devastating and irreversible for local communities as well as for communities around the world.

If you step back and think for a minute on the priorities that I’ve set out today, the reality is that every single one of them was championed by Africans first – the interconnectedness of our health and our climate, the principle that all nations should have the right to choose their own fate, the idea that inequity within and between nations threatens our shared security and prosperity. For decades, African citizens, African countries, the bloc of African nations pushed for these very priorities. And today, to the benefit of people in the United States and all nations, these are the world’s priorities.

Right now, in South Africa’s Northern Cape, the biggest radio telescope in the world – the MeerKAT – is capturing some of the most detailed views we’ve ever had of space. A series of images released in January show kinetic bursts of energy – incandescent reds and oranges – generated by a hundred million stars in the Milky Way, 25,000 light years away.

Producing just one of these images required 70 terabytes of data. It took three years to process – part of the cutting-edge research being led right here in South Africa. And this in a country where, as one scholar wrote, and I quote, “Prior to 1994, public investment... was largely an instrument for advancing the objectives of the apartheid government.” That was Dr. Pandor, by the way, writing when was serving as minister of science and technology. (Applause.)

When MeerKAT’s images were published, the chief scientist at the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory said, “The best telescopes expand our horizons in unexpected ways.” Just think, for a moment, of all the horizons expanded by those images. Think of the scientists around the world using MeerKAT’s data to unpack the greatest mysteries of human existence, like whether there’s life beyond Earth.

Think of the South African schoolkids who regularly visit MeerKAT-64's massive antennae – and imagine all the things that they will be inspired to do.

What's true of the best telescopes is true of the best partnerships: They expand our horizons in unexpected ways. To solve problems, yes, but also to marvel, to explore, to inspire. There is so much more for African nations and the United States to do together across so many fields, including some we may not even have discovered yet. As partners, that horizon is ours to make.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)