

Remarks by President Biden and President Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa Before Bilateral Meeting

The White House Speeches and Remarks September 16, 2022

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, Mr. President, it's great to have you here as I — we were talking before you came in about how magnificent I think your country is. I spent some time in my campaign, which lasted for years, against apartheid to visit your country. And it's magnificent.

And, you know, it's an honor to welcome you to the White House. I've been looking forward to this for a while. The United States and South Africa and your government have the same value set.

And, you know, I've long been inspired by the long struggle of freedom and justice. And one of the great moments of my career was when — the first time Nelson Mandela came to the United States. And we — we were in — I was a senator at the time, and we met in the Senate Foreign Relations executive committee room.

And he came in, and we all stood there and said hello to him and the like. And afterwards, he asked me to come by my office. And he came by to say thank you, because he heard I had been stopped trying to get to — to visit him, to see him in prison.

And I had said once — I said I got arrested. I wasn't arrested; I got stopped.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: You got stopped. Yeah. Yeah.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Prevented from — from moving. But — and he was extremely gracious.

And, you know, we've ended up with two great democracies, and a lot to do. And you've become — you personally and your country are such a critical part of what happens in a continent of 100 million people — billion people, almost.

And — and we — we really need to make sure we're — fully understand one another. And, you know, our trade relations with South Africa — we have 600 American companies doing business in South Africa.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: True.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: And you're a leader on climate and health and COVID-19. I'd like to talk to you about that, because we want to see you be able to produce COVID insulin on the continent, in your country, et cetera. And you — you were one of the international leaders that agreed with my effort to try to do away with a patent listing on these drugs.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: That's right.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: So — but we can still get a lot done, I think.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: (Laughs.)

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Look, our partnership is essential in addressing many of the world's pressing challenges, from the food security crisis to —

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: That's right. Yes.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: And South Africa is a vital voice on the global stage and a leader in the international order.

We have a lot to talk about. There's a lot that's happening around the world — not only on the continent of Africa, but around the world that you're engaged in as well.

So, welcome. I'm looking forward to our conversation. And thanks for taking the time to be here.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you for welcoming me and my delegation to the White House. It's always a joy to meet you and to exchange views and thoughts with you.

We are really delighted that we can come on a working visit to meet you. There are a whole host of issues we would like to discuss.

And, of course, our relations really are historic. They date from far back. The United States is an important partner to South Africa from a trade and investment point of view.

As you correctly say, you've got 600 or so companies that invest and operate in South Africa. And a number of them are already making huge investments, and we'll be meeting some of them. And we really welcome the opportunity to be here so that we can extend those relations and we can get more companies to invest in South Africa to create jobs.

We're also here to say thank you for the support that the United States gave to South Africa and to the African continent with regards to fighting COVID-19, the vaccines that you made available, as well as the support that you gave us when we were advocating for a TRIPS waiver at the World Trade Organization, and we are grateful for that.

But we also want to cover a number of areas related to COVID-19 and the vaccines, particularly to finish the negotiations with regard to therapeutics and diagnostics, which — the matter is due for finalization before the end of the year.

And of course, we want to discuss what I would call global stability and security, particularly in relation to our region where we've had insurgents targeting one of our neighboring countries, Mozambique —

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Yes.

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA: — so that we can discuss that as well. Of course, for us, that's very important.

And indeed, this morning, we had wonderful discussions with the Vice President. We covered a whole range of issues, including gender empowerment. Because for us, the empowerment of women is also very important.

And of course, climate change is a matter that we should discuss in a little while, particularly in relation to a just transition, as many of our people are a bit fearful of what a just transition could mean.

So, thank you very much. There's a lot of issues that we have to cover, and we really welcome this opportunity.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, thank you for taking — making the effort. And we have a lot to discuss, so thank you.