

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 9, 2023

Secretary Antony J. Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Ambassador Katherine C. Tai
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

The Honorable Jacob J. Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW,
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Secretary Blinken, Ambassador Tai, and Mr. Sullivan:

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is the cornerstone of the United States' economic relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa, enabling deeper commercial ties and strengthening U.S. relationships with the region. We strongly support this program, and support its reauthorization well ahead of its expiration in 2025. The annual AGOA Forum offers an important opportunity for U.S. and African leaders to bolster economic and diplomatic relations, and we support your continued work to convene a forum in Africa this year. However, we wish to express serious concerns with current plans to host this year's AGOA Forum in South Africa.

South Africa's government has formally taken a neutral stance on Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine, but has deepened its military relationship with Russia over the past year. Late last year, a Russian cargo vessel subject to U.S. sanctions docked in South Africa's largest naval port, and intelligence suggests that the South African government used this opportunity to covertly supply Russia with arms and ammunition that could be used in its illegal war in Ukraine. In February, South Africa held joint military exercises with Russia and China, and in April, authorized a Russian military cargo plane—also subject to U.S. sanctions—to land at a South African air force base. On top of this, in August, South Africa will host the BRICS Summit where the government aims to strengthen its ties with China and Russia and is working to facilitate the participation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, despite the outstanding arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

We are seriously concerned that hosting the 2023 AGOA Forum in South Africa would serve as an implicit endorsement of South Africa's damaging support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and possible violation of U.S. sanctions law. Further, these actions by South Africa call into question its eligibility for trade benefits under AGOA due to the statutory requirement that beneficiary countries "not engage in activities that undermine United States national security or

foreign policy interests.” While we understand that the AGOA eligibility review process for 2024 is underway and that decisions have not yet been made, we question whether a country in danger of losing AGOA benefits should have the privilege of hosting the 2023 AGOA Forum. Our concerns are shared by many South African citizens and businesses, who are increasingly vocal about deteriorating conditions in the country.

We encourage you to explore other possible locations to host this year’s forum: we believe it is important that the forum take place this year and that it be held in Africa, continuing the tradition of alternating the forum’s location between the United States and an AGOA-eligible country. If South Africa continues to demonstrate support for Russia in its unlawful invasion of Ukraine, then hosting the forum in another country in Sub-Saharan Africa would send a clear and important message that the United States continues to stand with Ukraine and will not accept our trading partners provision of aid to Russia’s ongoing and brutal invasion.

Thank you, we appreciate your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
Chairman, Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Senate Committee on Appropriations



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations
Committee



GREGORY W. MEEKS
Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs
Committee



MICHAEL T. MCCAUL
Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee