

# Secretary Antony J. Blinken At the AGOA Private Sector Forum

## REMARKS

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**U.S. INSTITUTE OF PEACE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**JULY 24, 2024**

**SECRETARY BLINKEN:** Morning. Thank you very much.

Well, hello, everyone. And as always, it is wonderful to be at the U.S. Institute for Peace.

I'm grateful to Ambassador Moose, the entire team here at the institute, for hosting us and for a longstanding partnership with the Department of State – one that we deeply value.

To Ambassador Tai, my friend and colleague; Ambassador Muchanga; Florie Liser; champions of AGOA from across the African continent, including from the private sector and civil society – thank you. Thank you for all that you do – all that you do every day to strengthen the economic partnership between the United States and the countries of Africa.

For decades, our businesses – American, African – have helped create jobs, uplift communities on both sides of the Atlantic, and build stronger connections between our people.

Over the last two decades, a key pillar of that partnership has been the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

By allowing products from sub-Saharan countries to enter the United States without paying tariffs, AGOA has let entrepreneurs expand to new markets to grow their businesses. It's created tens of thousands of good jobs across our nations – from Portland, Oregon to Port Louis, Mauritius. It's helped companies further diversify and strengthen their supply chains – so that consumers can benefit from more affordable, more innovative products.

AGOA has also created incentives for governments to develop more stable and transparent business environments that attract more – and better – direct investment. It's given us a platform for building more just societies, helping reduce poverty, protect our planet, defend the rights of our workers.

As we approach the renewal deadline next year, President Biden and our entire government fully support reauthorizing AGOA, and we'll continue working with our colleagues in Congress to make that happen.

We're also focused on modernizing AGOA, to reflect how our countries and our economies and international markets have evolved since the law was first passed. We see value in an AGOA that is agile, that's adaptable, that's capable of driving trade forward in a dynamic environment. Whether we're trying to meet the challenges of the climate crisis, prepare for the next pandemic, respond to shifts in global demand, we want AGOA to be ready – ready to support the businesses and the economies of the future.

The United States will continue investing in Africa because, as President Biden said when he hosted the Africa Leaders Summit: “When Africa succeeds, the United States succeeds...[and] the whole world succeeds as well.”

Everyone in this room knows well over the next 30 years, one in four inhabitants of our planet will be from the African continent. As we look at demographic trends, I think most people would not know the answer to this question, but if you asked 25 years from now what will be the third most populous country on Earth after India and after China, the answer is the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Many of us share a common vision for what needs to be a successful partnership between the United States and Africa, including an economic future that's more competitive, that's more resilient, and that's more stable for all of our people – one where our interdependence is not a sign of weakness to be exploited, but an asset that we can effectively leverage.

So we've been working alongside governments from across sub-Saharan Africa to invest in our joint strengths and to help shape a shared economic future.

One way we're doing that is not just by working to create more opportunities for trade with the United States – we want to create better opportunities that benefit businesses in all our countries, that support our workers, and that protect our environment.

In all of this, the private sector is the essential partner.

We can't deliver for our people on issues that matter most without your talent, without your innovation, without your investment.

That's why, at the Africa Leaders Summit, we committed to growing our collaboration with the private sector – through, but also beyond, AGOA.

Since then, we've been working very closely together – and with our colleagues across the United States Government – to help close hundreds of new private sector deals between African and American businesses. Altogether, they're worth more than \$16 billion.

For example, in March, multiple agencies came together to launch the Africa Trade Desk. This is a platform that connects African agricultural producers with more than 20,000 American retailers – like Walmart, like Whole Foods. Already, we've helped conclude a \$56 billion [\[1\]](#) agreement to bring South African grapes to the United States, while meeting requirements that promote good conditions for workers.

All of that said, we know that deals like these are only one part of the equation. You all need to be able to plan ahead, to attract capital, to manage risks. We know that means more predictable, more transparent policies; robust infrastructure; safe and stable conditions to grow your businesses; healthy and educated workforces; close and transparent collaboration with governments – from the local level all the way up – to make sure that the needs of communities and the needs of companies are being met.

So we're working with our partners to foster the conditions that enable economic growth and pave the way for investment – around the world and across the African continent.

Take infrastructure, for example. Over the last two years, the United States has committed \$82 million toward expanding digital access and improving digital literacy across sub-Saharan Africa. This will open doors to economic opportunity, support entrepreneurship, and help workers and economies compete in the 21st century.

We've also contributed \$3 billion to expand the Lobito Corridor, something I saw with my own eyes a few months ago when I visited Angola. This corridor connecting Angola, Zambia, the DRC through high-impact investments in ports, in bridges, in rail lines, in roads, in high-speed internet access, in clean energy and agriculture – all designed to unlock growth in key industries along a major economic thoroughfare.

This initiative includes a project we announced just last week. Our Export-Import Bank approved a \$1.6 billion loan to help construct solar energy grids in Angola. Once they're complete, they'll generate power for water supply systems – increasing access to electricity and clean drinking water for businesses and communities across four provinces.

Of course, trade programs like AGOA are also crucial for creating good environments for business, for breaking down barriers to economic cooperation, for bringing the benefits of trade home to all of our people.

And folks here today and those listening in know this better than anyone.

So in the months ahead, I'd like to ask one thing: Let us – and our partners in sub-Saharan Africa – let us know how we can do more to collaborate, how we can make AGOA even more effective.

Together, we'll keep working toward the idea that inspired AGOA so many years ago, ideas that are still at the heart of our vision for the future: to build more equitable, more prosperous, more stable societies with more opportunity for everyone.

That's our goal; that's our objective. AGOA is a critical tool for helping us achieve it, and I'm grateful for the support and the work that all of you are doing in that direction.

So thank you for being here today. Thank you for being part of this effort. It's a great pleasure now for me to cede the microphone to Ambassador Muchanga of the African Union.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

**[1]** \$56 million