

Remarks by Ambassador Katherine Tai at the 2024 AGOA Private Sector Forum

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Thank you very much Florie for your remarks and for that introduction.

Good morning, everyone. Wonderful. It's a pleasure to be here with all of you today.

I first want to thank Florie and George and everyone at both the Corporate Council on Africa and the U.S. Institute of Peace for organizing this event.

I also want to congratulate CCA on organizing what I understand was a very successful U.S.-Africa Business Summit in Dallas in May.

Now while I wasn't able to join you in person, I did send some video remarks. And as I said in my recorded remarks, which I do remember what I say in those remarks, America and Africa, we share an intertwined history—and there is no better time than now to turn our old history into new history.

And I am so extremely optimistic about our future. Not only because of the work we do in government, and not only because of the work of one company or organization, but because of the people of Africa.

I was honored to lead the U.S. delegation to last year's AGOA Forum, which took place just outside Soweto in South Africa.

And I remember touring that incredible "Made in Africa" exhibition that we were just talking about during last year's AGOA Forum, with President Ramaphosa and former minister Patel, and this enormous crowd of singing, dancing, cheering, celebratory colleagues. The exhibition showcased almost 500 companies from across the continent, many of whom are exporting to the United States.

And as I walked through the exhibition and saw firsthand the variety of products—from massive drones to delicious foodstuffs, beautiful jewelry, really excellent Peri

Peri sauce as well—I could sense, I could see, the pride the business owners in the things that they are making.

They were so proud of what they made, who they were making it with, and where they've been able to sell and share their goods—including right here in the United States.

And for me, it was an incredibly important reminder of the impact that AGOA has on real people and real lives.

The woman entrepreneur I met seeking to expand her extremely successful macadamia nut processing business. The small business owner making apparel and handicrafts. And the students and the young people, waiting to make their mark.

When I say that AGOA is the cornerstone of our economic partnership, I don't mean it in the abstract—it has positively touched so many people's lives already. And it has the potential to do so much more.

Especially during a time when more people are feeling an increased sense of economic insecurity, our trade tools must be used to democratize economic opportunity for more people—they must be used for building out the common good.

In the midst of uncertainty that we are all experiencing in our economies and in the global economy today, what must remain constant is what we stand for, what our values are.

Because our economies are more than just a set of statistics. Our economies are made of people, so our economic policies, including and maybe especially our trade policies, we know must serve our people. This is foundational for the Biden-Harris Administration and it's foundational for AGOA itself.

The AGOA Forum this week is important and timely, because we have an opportunity to make it even better and more effective.

We can do more to improve utilization rates, especially for the smaller and developing countries on the continent.

We can do more to make sure that the program is more responsive to more of today's challenges—like supply chain fragility and the climate crisis.

We can do more to bring more voices to the table, especially women, youth, smaller companies, and the African Diaspora—and actually incorporate their voices concretely into our work and into this next iteration of AGOA.

Private enterprise—which is all of you here today—you have an incredibly important role to play to realize these goals.

American and African companies, including many represented right here and in this room today, have helped turn AGOA's vision, this program, into concrete results.

Many of you have been devoted to this for a long time. Now is the time for all of us to come together to renew that devotion.

You stand for much more than the products you sell or the services you provide. So let's make this next era of AGOA even more transformative, for more people across the continent, and along the way, let's build the partnership between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa to an even stronger one that we have had in these last 24 years.

This is not just for the big companies, but also for the smaller ones, and for all of our workers.

You all bring unique and critical perspectives, and I'm looking forward to hearing from you all over the next few days.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to address you. I hope you have a productive and meaningful forum.

And I am pleased and looking forward to these next few days along with all of you.

Thank you.

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