

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

The President's News Conference With President William Ruto of Kenya
May 23, 2024

President Biden. Good afternoon, everyone. Please have a seat.

Mr. President, six decades ago, when Kenya was—declared its independence, President Lyndon Baines Johnson wrote a letter from our Nation to yours. And he said, "May the responsibilities of freedom wake the best that is in you."

Today we are—mark 60 years of partnership between our democracies, and we're fulfilling that wish together, and we're continuing. I truly believe that it has brought out the best in both of us. Not only in Kenya and America, but around the world, it's had positive impact.

But through our partnership, we are continuing to meet our responsibilities in four key areas.

First, I'm proud to announce we're working with Congress to designate Kenya a major non-NATO ally. That's a fulfillment of years of collaboration.

Our joint counterterrorism operations have degraded ISIS and al-Shabaab across East Africa. Our mutual support for Ukraine has rallied the world to stand behind the U.N. Charter. And our work together on Haiti is helping pave the way to reduce instability and insecurity.

And I want to thank you, Mr. President, for Kenya's leadership of the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti.

Our new partner—global partnership is going to build on all this progress. We're going to make—meet new challenges and with more resources. And it's going to strengthen the security of our countries and our—countries around the world.

Second, we're deepening our economic cooperation. Both President Ruto and I have focused on growing economies—our growing economies and growing them from the bottom up and the middle out and the bottom up. And when that happens, everybody does well, not the top down. Because when the middle class does well, the poor have a ladder up and the wealthy still do very well. That's true in Kenya, that's true in America, and that's true around the world.

Right now many companies—many countries, debt stands in the way of growth. Too many nations are forced to make a choice between development and debt, between investing in their people and paying back their creditors.

So today we're launching what we're calling the Nairobi-Washington Vision. This initiative is going to bring together international financial institutions and nations from all around the world to mobilize more resources for countries saddled with debt; to open more opportunities to the private-sector financing; and to promote transparent, sustainable, and affordable lending practices.

These are big goals. It's going to take time to see lasting progress.

But we're providing \$250 million—the United States is—to the World Bank in a crisis-response window. In the coming weeks, the United States is going to make an additional \$21 billion available to the International Monetary Fund.

And today I'm proud to announce there'll be \$250 billion in new lending capacity from multilateral development banks like the World Bank to help low-income nations invest in their development and tackle growing challenges. This is supported by the United States and many other countries as well.

Next, we're launching a new era of technology—technological cooperation between the United States and Kenya. That means new partnerships: new partnerships with industry, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and cybersecurity companies; new initiatives to expand affordable internet all across East Africa; new education programs that are going to bring Kenyan students to the United States to study in the STEM fields.

And I'm proud to announce that I am working with Congress to make Kenya the first country in Africa to receive funding through the CHIPS and Science Act, which has served us well.

This funding would link their supply chains to the United States and to our partners and spur innovation that extends from Silicon Valley in California to Silicon Savannah in Kenya, which, by the way, is already a \$1 billion tech hub—already a billion-dollar tech hub.

Finally, we are ensuring democracy delivers for our people. That includes Kenya's diaspora community here in the United States.

Two years ago, our Nation's first Black Vice President, President Kamala Harris, launched the Nation's first Presidential Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement. Today, we're building on her work to strengthen longstanding bonds between our people.

I also want to thank you, Mr. President, for taking action to implement the long-awaited Public Benefits Organization Act, which provides historic protections for civil society and NGOs all across Kenya.

Like you, I believe the future is going to be won by countries that unleash the full potential—the full potential—of their populations, including civil society, women, and young people. And I look forward to working together to implement this act and jump-starting anticorruption reforms to promote democratic values that bind our nations together.

Now, let me close with this. Taken together, these are responsibilities Kenya and America must meet in the years ahead—meet them together, as partners—for security, for prosperity, for innovation, and most importantly, for democracy.

But I know these responsibilities will wake the best in us. And I know we'll bring—not only bring our nations together, but I want to thank you for—again, Mr. President, for being here and knowing we have even bigger dreams for the cooperation of our countries.

The floor is yours, sir.

President Ruto. Thank you, Mr. President. And I want to—in a very, very sincere way—thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to make this state visit to the United States on behalf of the people and Government of Kenya. I also take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the warm welcome we have received on arrival and the excellent hospitality of the American people.

My visit provides us, Mr. President, with the opportunity to celebrate 60 years of bilateral relations rooted on shared values of freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, and inclusivity.

My visit takes place at a time when democracy is perceived to be retreating worldwide. The accelerating drift towards regimes indifferent to democratic values is of deep concern to us, and I believe it is time the U.S., working with Kenya, deploys its capabilities and rally likeminded democratic countries to set up the cause for democracy.

During our discussions, we agreed on the significant opportunity for the U.S. to radically recalibrate its strategy and strengthen its support for Africa, as discussed at the U.S.-Africa Leadership Summit, by enhancing its investment in the institutions of African integration and increasing support for peace and security.

As we take this historic step of elevating our partnership to be more effective in addressing global challenges, it is important for us to appreciate that many countries in Africa, including Kenya, are struggling with an overwhelming convergence of multiple shocks, including extreme climate events, debt distress, and the destructive—disruptive upheavals in Europe and the Middle East, whose cumulative impact is to divert national resources from investment in people and economic growth into managing climate-induced crisis and servicing sovereign debt.

For this reason, I have underscored the imperative for our partnership to facilitate recovery from these multiple crises and particularly for the United States of America to take a leading role in a comprehensive debt resolution framework by doubling contributions to the concessionary financing window of the World Bank and also to work with the IMF on rechanneling SDRs to institutions like the Africa Development Bank to further leverage on private-sector funding to support countries.

Unless this is done and done immediately, the values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law are in great jeopardy.

On regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, I express optimism that Kenya and the U.S. will innovatively design appropriate defense and security frameworks to help Kenya, as the anchor state, and the region in general to deal with the peace and security challenges that are undermining human well-being, slowing down development, and also having a negative impact on democracy.

We affirmed our mutual commitment to the stabilization of Haiti through the Multinational Security Support Mission.

The Kenya-U.N. Climate and Clean Energy Industrial Partnership we have just committed to is an encouraging milestone on our collective journey and builds on the paradigm shift we have inaugurated at the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi last year. Accordingly, Africa's resource potential is a huge opportunity to deploy U.S. technology and investment to catalyze unprecedented growth through green industrialization.

We've also agreed to hasten the renewal of the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act to sustain the rising momentum of our investments and exports in the manufacturing space.

Similarly, we agreed to undertake sustainable green growth by facilitating conclusion of our Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership, alongside the renewal of AGOA.

During our discussions, I witnessed firsthand President Biden's and the U.S. Government's determination to make our partnership work and resolve to spread and deepen the roots of freedom, democracy, security, and prosperity throughout the world.

As my visit comes to a close, I am confident that our engagements have laid a solid foundation for us to continue the work—the good work we have begun with stronger faith and greater hope for success, because, in Joe Biden, Kenya and Africa have a strong and committed friend.

I thank you.

President Biden. Thank you, Mr. President. And you do have a friend. And you know, the African Continent is going to have a billion people not too soon. The idea we're going to ignore it, it makes no sense at all.

First question: Michael Wilner, McClatchy.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Two questions, if I may. On——

President Biden. No, one. *[Laughter]*

Haiti

Q. I'm going to do my level best. On Haiti and on Israel. Your administration went on a worldwide search for security forces—Beninese forces, Bangladeshi, Canadian, Chilean—any but American forces—to stand up this Multinational Security Support Mission for Haiti before Kenya stood up to lead.

Can you explain why it is that you believe, on the one hand, that this mission is so critical and, on the other, why it is that you have categorically ruled out contributing U.S. Forces to this effort? Is it your goal to beat back Haiti's gangs or to contain them?

And on Israel. Does the United States——

President Biden. One question. I'll answer your question.

Q. Okay. Yes, well, let me——

President Biden. Your question—your question with regard to Haiti is: We concluded that for the United States to deploy forces in the hemisphere just raises all kinds of questions that can be easily misrepresented about what we're trying to do and be able to be used by those who disagree with us and against our—against the interests of Haiti and the United States.

So we set out to find a partner or partners who would lead that effort that we would participate in, not with American forces, but with supplies and making sure they have what they needed. And so, you know, I'm very grateful for President Ruto's leadership here. A multinational effort, but Kenya's willingness to really lead this matter matters. You're not the only country, but you're leading this effort.

And there's going to be U.S. Forces not on the ground, but we're going to supply logistics, intelligence, and equipment. Matter of fact, some equipment has already arrived. And Kenya is stepping up with police, and other countries plan to do as well. The United States is going to support the collective effort here.

And of course, Kenya won't be going in alone. We're working with Congress to provide \$300 million to MSS Mission and an additional \$60 million for equipment assistance. And we have also—we have received and are continuing to bring major contributions from other partners in as well.

President Ruto and I agree that the Haitian people deserve better. They deserve peace and security. And I thank him for taking on this responsibility. But we have his back, and we're there all the way.

Q. I do have a question for you, President Ruto.

International Criminal Court

But before I do, I do very briefly have a question on whether the United States has any evidence at all that would substantiate the ICC Prosecutor's specific allegations against Israeli leaders that they are using starvation as a tactic of war in Gaza—or exculpatory evidence, for that matter—and would—if you would commit to releasing that information before any potential issuance of ICC arrest warrants.

And, President Ruto, the mission that Kenya is about to lead in Haiti is obviously a support mission; that is well known. But the fact is that Haiti's national police have been internationally funded and trained for some time and, nevertheless, have obviously failed to beat back these gangs.

Will Kenyan forces, in partnership with the MSS, be out front in the fight against these gangs? Or will they be a static force behind the HNP? And are you concerned about casualties among the Kenyan forces?

President Ruto. Thank you very much.

Kenya believes that the responsibility of peace and security anywhere in the world, including in Haiti, is the collective responsibility of all nations and all peoples who believe in freedom, self-determination, democracy, and justice.

And it is the reason why Kenya took up this responsibility, because we have been participating in peacemaking and we have been participating in peacekeeping over the last 40 years in 47 countries, including very difficult neighborhoods, like what we are going to face in Haiti.

We are going to take up that responsibility alongside the Haiti police. And we have clear modus operandi how we are going to relate with the situation on the ground that has been agreed under the United Nations framework.

So we are looking forward to this deployment because we believe that the women and children in Haiti deserve peace, like all other women and children and people around the world.

President Biden. Look, we made my position known on ICC. You guys never keep the deal, but that's okay. *[Laughter]* That—you know, we've made our position clear on the ICC. We don't think the—we don't recognize their jurisdiction—the ICC—the way it's being exercised. And it's that simple. We don't think there's an equivalence between what Israel did and what Hamas did.

Okay, next. I—do I ask the next question as well?

President Ruto. Let me ask Ayub Abdikadir [Citizen TV Kenya] from Kenya for the next question. *[Inaudible]*

Afghanistan/Haiti/Democratic Republic of the Congo

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you. One question, and this is on Haiti. *[Laughter]*

President Biden, Kenya is rather doing the heavy lifting in our turbulent regions: Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Washington, as you have mentioned, has committed millions of dollars for the cost in Haiti.

Isn't it ironic that while America is ending its forever wars in Afghanistan—the latest in 2021, under your leadership, when you withdrew troops from Kabul—and that you're committing Kenya to another foreign wars 12,000 kilometers away from Nairobi?

I mean, why the discrepancy? Why the dichotomy, while you're ending your forever wars, overseas wars, yet you are committing Kenya to Haiti? Can you explain that?

President Biden. Very easily. *[Laughter]*

There's a reason why Afghanistan has been known as the "graveyard of empires." The likelihood of anybody uniting Afghanistan is highly, highly, highly unlikely. Number one.

Number two, there are ways to control ISIS other than occupying Afghanistan. It was an unnecessary need.

Now, with regard to Haiti, Haiti is in the area of the Caribbean that is very volatile. There's a lot going on in this hemisphere. And we're in a situation where we want to do all we can without us looking like America, once again, is stepping over and deciding "this is what must be done."

Haitians are looking for help, as well as the folks in the Caribbean are looking for help.

And so we checked out with a number of other countries. The one who stepped up was Haiti [Kenya; White House correction]. We've committed to provide them the wherewithal—the intelligence and equipment and the like—to Haiti. And so it's a logical thing.

And you have a first-rate capability, and you keep your word. That's an important dynamic.

President Ruto. I agree with President Biden that Kenya's participation in Haiti is not so much about what happened in the past. It's about what we believe in: the peace and security of humanity.

And we don't find that the U.S. is committing Kenya, because the U.S. cannot commit Kenya. I am the President of Kenya. It's me to make that decision. And it's the people of Kenya to commit their own troops, using their own structures.

We've gone through the processes in Kenya. Parliament has approved. We have a clear mandate. We have a clear framework. And it is us, the people of Kenya, who made this decision in the interest of serving peace and stability as a responsible global citizen and understanding that insecurity, instability anywhere is insecurity and instability everywhere.

President Biden. And by the way, you asked about—you implied that we weren't doing anything anywhere else. Well, we're kind of occupied around the world. But we're also engaging in Congo, in the neighborhood, and you know, we're going to continue to help alleviate human suffering there.

The United States is the largest humanitarian donor, providing \$375 million in humanitarian funding just this year, including support for more than 6 million displaced people from the D.R.C. So we are engaged in more than one place.

Q. Follow-up to my President, Dr. Ruto. You said that Kenya is committed. And in your Carter speech in Atlanta, you said it's based on humanitarianism, helping Haiti out. But can you explain the geopolitical goal 12,000 kilometers away from Nairobi when schools in the counties of Baringo, West Pokot, and Turkana have not yet opened because of the banditry problem, yet you are committing our national police force to Haiti? And where is the priority, this being one of your major manifesto pillars, talking about security?

And to the extent that even the Defense Cabinet Secretary talked about the deployment of, if need be, the Kenyan military or the special personnel to make sure that schools are reopened, children go to school in areas that are bandit-prone in Kenya. Why are you committing to Haiti when we have a problem back home? Isn't it an irony that you are putting [out; White House correction] the fire in the faraway neighbor's home when your—when our own home is on fire?

President Ruto. Thank you very much. I made a commitment to the people of Kenya to sort out insecurity in the North Rift. I have followed that with action. As we talk, there are 3,000 military officers in the North Rift, 2,000 police officers in the North Rift. We have renovated the first 15 schools and completed—we have reopened 20 schools already that were closed in the North Rift.

And that exercise is ongoing. We have made tremendous progress in making sure that we create security at home. But that does not take away our responsibility. Even as we were deploying troops and policemen in our own country in North Rift to sort out the banditry problem, we still deployed 1,000 troop—1,000 troop—troops to D.R.C. Congo because that is our neighborhood.

We have 5,000 troops in Somalia because, equally, that is our responsibility. And Haiti should not be an exception. That's why deploying a thousand security men to Haiti speaks to the same belief and commitment to peace and security.

President Biden. The next question is from April Ryan [Grio].

Haiti

Q. Mr. Presidents—President Biden, President Ruto—thank you.

First of all, when you talk about Haiti, President Ruto, you said, "Haiti is a collective responsibility for all nations." And for you, Mr. President—President Biden, President Ruto—do you believe that these nations can break the back of this militia that has gripped the nation there?

And also, when it comes to Congo—thank you, Mr. President, for bringing up what the United States is doing for the Congo, especially as that flag was behind you at Morehouse. Mr. President, could you tell me what the African Union is doing, as well as Kenya is doing, when it comes to the humanitarian crisis in the Congo? Thank you.

President Biden. What was my question? [Laughter]

Q. Sir, your question was Haiti. Can——

President Biden. Yes.

Q. ——the United States and Kenya or the nations collectively break the backs of this coordinated militia that has the grips of the nation—that nation? Thank you.

President Biden. Yes.

Q. Tell me how please. [Laughter]

President Biden. The very way we're doing it. We're not talking about a thousand-person army that's made up of trained persons—this is a crisis that's able to be dealt with. And we think we can—dealt with this way with a multinational approach with Haiti leading the way and us providing the intelligence as well as equipment.

President Ruto. Gangs and criminals do not have nationalities. They have no religion. They have no language. Their language is one: to deal with them firmly, decisively, within the parameters of the law. And that's why we're building a coalition of nations beyond Kenya and the U.S., many who are making contributions towards the MSS force in Haiti, to secure that country and to break the back of the gangs and the criminals that have visited untold suffering in that country.

On D.R.C., the AU, the East African Community, and Kenya has seized—[inaudible]—I've just told you that Kenya had a thousand troops in Haiti. We now have another 800—not in Haiti, but in D.R.C. We now have another 800 troops from SADC.

We are going to be having a meeting of the East African Community. I did send my Minister of—my Foreign Minister to Kinshasa. They had a conversation. And shortly, we will be looking at how to begin the dialogue process under the Nairobi Process, because we believe there is no military solution to what is going on in D.R.C. But instead, dialogue should be able to give us the necessary momentum and outcomes that would solve the matters in eastern D.R.C.

So both the AU, the East African Community, and Kenya as a country are seized of that matter. We know that the humanitarian crisis in eastern D.R.C. has displaced close to 7 million people.

And I want to thank the United States of America for stepping in with humanitarian support for that region, because it is a collaboration of different countries in different ways to deal with that situation. The rest of us are committing troops. We are committing our—deploying our infrastructure to facilitate the resolution of the matters in D.R.C.

President Biden. Is that it?

Q. Mr. President?

President Ruto. Let me ask Nancy Agutu [Radio Africa Group] from Kenya. She is here? Okay, Nancy.

International Monetary Fund/International Development Association

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Africa is asking America to lead the way and double its contribution to the World Bank's International Development Assistance to help developing countries access more financing to alleviate debt distress and to tackle climate change. What is your commitment on this? Thank you.

President Biden. Would you—I'm sorry. I didn't catch all your question.

Q. Sorry. I'm saying Africa is asking America to lead the way and double its contribution to the World Bank's International Development Assistance to help developing countries——

President Biden. Yes.

Q. ——to access financing to alleviate debt distress and to tackle climate change. What is your commitment on this?

President Biden. We made a major commitment to this.

Number one, as I said, the United States has long championed international financial institutions that provide low-cost concessional resources to the poorest developing countries, including from the IMF.

To that end, my administration helped design and establish the IMF's new initiative that provides low-cost funding to—for countries that are taking steps to enhance their resilience. Important partners in Africa have the capital they—ensure they have their capital they need to invest in their futures.

We heard them, and we stand with them. Now, that's why we've worked with Congress to enable the United States to make available in the coming weeks up to \$21 billion in new lending resources to the IMF trust fund that provides concessional lending to the poorest countries.

It's a little like a—you know, having to go—when you're in debt, having to go and find someone to help you out. That's what this is about.

We believe supporting your friends and in this partnership is happy to—we were happy to do our part.

And look, we've also doubled our commitment to the IDA. And I'm proud the United States is the biggest donor to the IDA in this cycle and proud to be working with—alongside Kenya to support robust financing and a policy package that are going to help the most vulnerable countries address their investment needs.

There's debt and there's growth, and you can't—you've got to deal with the debt before you deal with the growth. And so what we're—we're trying to use international lending organizations to be able to provide that capability so people can grow. That's what it's about.

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

Q. Will you allow Ukraine to strike inside——

President Biden. Whoa! *[Laughter]*

Q. ——Russia?

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. This concludes the press conference. Thanks, everybody.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Press Secretary Jean-Pierre. Thank you, everybody. This concludes the press conference. Thank you. Thanks, everybody.

Q. Will you allow Ukraine to strike inside Russia?

President Biden. Thank you, all. Thanks.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:29 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. President Ruto referred to Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs Musalia Mudavadi of Kenya. Reporters referred to International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan; and Cabinet Secretary for Defense Aden Duale of Kenya. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 24.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences, President Ruto of Kenya.

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Names: Harris, Kamala D.; Jean-Pierre, Karine; Ruto, William.

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