

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters in Belas, Angola
December 3, 2024

You are a brave crowd to come out in the rain. I brought my hat just in case. I don't have much hair to help me. *[Laughter]*

Leaders of Angola, government and civil society, students, young leaders, staff of the National Slavery Museum, distinguished guests, I sincerely mean this when I say thank you for being here in the rain with us today. Thank you for allowing me to be here. It's an honor, a genuine honor, to be with you today in Angola.

I just got off the phone with the Vice President, telling her I'm sorry she's not with me to be here today, you know, with you in Angola, the—a vibrant city. And I—look, not the city. The city, I know, is not Angola—*[laughter]*—but in Angola in a vibrant city.

And I'm joined by Members of the United States Congress, senior officials of my administration, and American business and civic leaders. We think that it's important that we get together. We thank all people of Angola for your warm hospitality, and I mean that—please sit down if you have a seat. Don't—I'm sorry. *[Laughter]* I wasn't sure you all had seats.

We're gathered at a solemn location. Because to fully consider how far our two countries have come in our friendship, we have to remember how we began.

We hear them in the wind and the waves. Young women, young men born free in the highlands of Angola, only to be captured, bound, and forced on a "death march" along this very coast to this spot by slave traders in the year 1619.

In the building next to us, they were baptized into a foreign faith against their will, their names changed against their will to Anthony and Isabella. Then they were condemned to a slave ship bound for the Middle Passage, packed together in hundreds by hundreds. A third of those souls did not survive the journey. One-third died on the way.

But Anthony and Isabella made it to the British colony in Virginia, where they were sold into servitude and became two of the first enslaved Americans in a place that, 150 years later, would become the United States of America. They had a son, considered the first child of African descent born in America: William Tucker.

It was the beginning of slavery in the United States. Cruel. Brutal. Dehumanizing. Our Nation's original sin—original sin—one that haunted America and casts a long shadow ever since.

From the bloody Civil War that nearly tore my nation apart to the long battle with Jim Crow in the—to—into the 1960s for the civil rights and voting rights movement—which got me involved in public life, during which American cities were burned—to the still unfinished reckoning with racial injustice of my country today.

Historians believe people of Angola accounted for a significant number of all enslaved people shipped to America. Today, millions of African Americans have roots in Angola.

As I said at the U.S.-African leaders summit that held in Washington 2 years—I held in Washington 2 years ago: "Our people lie at the heart of the deep and profound connection that forever binds Africa and the United States together. We remember the stolen men and women and children who were brought to our shores in chains, subjected to unimaginable cruelty."

Here with us today are three Americans who are direct descendants of Anthony and Isabella, those first enslaved Americans—Africans in America. Wanda Tucker of Hamilton [Hampton; White House correction], Virginia. Wanda, are you there? There you are, Wanda. God love you. Her brother Vincent and Carolita as well. Thank you for being here. We're going to write history, not erase history.

The Tuckers learned their family history around the dinner table. That history led Wanda here in Angola a few years ago. She did not know how to speak the language, but that didn't matter. When she arrived, Wanda said she felt something profound, like she'd come home. That was her comment to me. She called it the "connection without words."

Ladies and gentlemen, I am here today to honor that connection between our people and to pay tribute to the generations of Angolans and American families, like the Tuckers, who have served in Government for over—I've served in Government for over 50 years. I know I only look like I'm 40 years old, but I've been around hanging in the Government for—[laughter]—I hate to admit it—for 50 years.

But in that 50 years, I've learned a lot. Perhaps most importantly, I have learned that while history can be hidden, it cannot and should not be erased. It should be faced. It's our duty to face our history: the good, the bad, and the ugly—the whole truth. That's what great nations do.

That's why I chose to speak here at the National Slavery Museum today, just as I toured. And that's why your President visited the National Museum of African American Culture in the—in Washington, DC—the second most visited museum in the States—and he did it a few years ago.

He saw what I see: the stark contradiction between my country's founding principles of liberty, justice, and equality and the way we long treated people from Angola and from throughout Africa.

I've often said America is the only Nation in the world founded on an idea. Most countries are founded based on race, ethnicity, religion, geography, or some other attribute. But, in the United States, founded on idea, one embedded in our Declaration of Independence, and that is that all men and women are created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout their lives.

It's abundantly clear today we have not lived up to that idea, but we've never fully walked away from it either. And that's due in no small part to the determination and dreams of African Americans, including Angolan Americans.

The proud descendants of the diaspora who helped build my nation as they rebuilt their own families and their own sense of self. They were the forebearers as well—resilient, faithful, even hopeful—hopeful that joy would cometh in the morning, as it says in the Bible; hopeful that our past would not be the story of our future; and hopeful, in time, the United States would write a different story in partnership with the people brought here in chains to my nation from Africa. It's a story of mutual respect and mutual progress.

That's the history that brings me here, the first American President ever to visit Angola. Over time—and I'm proud to be. Over time, the relationship—between our countries has been transformed from distance to genuine warmth. Today, our relationship is the strongest it's ever been.

Throughout my Presidency, it's been my goal—goal of the United States—to build a strong partnership with peoples and nations across the continent of Africa—true partnerships aimed at achieving shared goals, bringing to bear the dynamism of America's private sector and the expertise of our Government to support aspirations of African entrepreneurs, experts, leaders both inside and outside of Government.

Because we know the challenge that define our age demand African leadership. One out of every four human beings on Earth will live in Africa by the year 2050. And the ingenuity and determination of young Africans in particular, like the young society leaders I just met with here today, will be undeniable forces in that human progress.

That's why I'm so optimistic, because of that generation. In no small part, it will be in their hands and the hands of people across Africa to expand access to clean energy, to tackle threats of global health, to grow global—a global middle class.

In many ways, Africa's—Africa's success is and will be the world's success. As I said at the United States—U.S.-Africa Summit: The United States is all in on Africa's future.

Two years ago, I pledged to deliver \$55 billion [billion; White House correction] in new investments in Africa and to mobilize American businesses to close new deals with African partners. Two years ago, we are out way ahead of schedule. More than 20 heads of U.S. Government agencies and members of my Cabinet have traveled to Africa, delivering over \$40 billion in investments thus far.

And we have announced nearly 1,200 new business deals between African and American companies—and American companies—total will be worth \$52 billion, including investments in solar energy, telecom, mobile finance, infrastructure, and partnerships with American airlines to expand opportunities for tourism so you don't have to fly to Paris to get here—although Paris is pretty nice. *[Laughter]*

Here in Angola alone, the United States has invested \$3 billion during my short Presidency. We see the bonds between our countries across sectors, from clean energy to health care to sports. The American Basketball Association—National Basketball Association launched Basketball Africa League, and Angola is the reigning champion.

And we see the impact of American culture across—African culture across the American culture, from music to entertainment to fashion to arts and so much more.

Student exchanges between our countries are essential and must increase. Students in both countries can be—better understand one another if they know the country, if they visit the country, if they're educated in the other country. An increased connection between us makes a big difference.

Being all in on Africa means making sure African voices are heard at the tables that matter most. Under my leadership, the United States brought—we brought in the African Union as a permanent member of the G-20 economies, and we insisted on more African representation among the leaders of the International Monetary Fund and other world financial institutions.

We've also pushed to ensure that developing nations do not—do not—choose—have to choose between paying down unsustainable debt and being able to invest in their own people. And we're using our voice—our own voice to increase Africa's presence on the U.N. Security Council at the United Nations. That should happen. You can clap for that, folks. You should be in there.

The United States continues to be the world's largest provider of humanitarian aid and development assistance. And that's going to increase. You know, that's the right thing for the wealthiest nation in the world to do.

And today I'm announcing over \$1 billion in new humanitarian support for Africans displaced from homes by historic droughts and food insecurity.

But we know African leaders and citizens are seeking more than just aid. You seek investment. And so the United States is expanding our relationship all across Africa—from

assistance to aid to investment to trade—moving from patrons to partners to help bridge the infrastructure gap.

I was told, by the way, when I got elected I could never get an infrastructure bill passed because the last guy spent 8 years saying, "Next month"—4 years saying, "Next month." Well, guess what, folks? We've done it. A trillion—a trillion three hundred billion dollars for infrastructure to narrow the digital divide, drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

We're looking for partners who understand that the right question in the year 2024 is not "What can the United States do for the people of Africa?" It's "What can we do together for the people of Africa?" That's what we're going to do.

Nowhere in Africa is the answer more exciting than here in Angola. It starts with our Governments, whose partnership is stronger, deeper, and more effective and active than any point in history. It's testament to your President, who had the vision to carry out this relationship—to carry this relationship forward. And it's a testament to Angolan citizens across the private sector and civil society who have forged strong bonds with your American counterparts.

And together, we're engaged in a major joint project to close the infrastructure gap for the benefit of Angolans, Africans across the continent, Americans, and the world. We'll all benefit, as you benefit. You're—you can produce much more agriculture, for example, than states that can't. You're going to increase their longevity, and you're going to increase your impact and profit.

It's called the Lobito Corridor. We're building railroad lines from Angola to the Port of Lobito, in Zambia and the D.R.C., and, ultimately, all the way to the Atlantic—from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. It will be the first transcontinental railroad in Africa and the biggest American rail investment outside of America.

And I must tell you up front, with American press here, I'm probably the most pro-rail guy in America. *[Laughter]* I've ridden over 1,300,000 miles on a daily basis to my work, 210—20 miles a day for the last 50 years.

Well, I didn't do it as President. I stayed in the White House a lot. But all kidding aside, folks, we can do this. We can do this. It's in our power.

It will not only generate significant employment, it will also allow individual countries to maximize their own domestic resources for the benefit of their people and sell critical minerals that power the world's energy transformation and our fight against climate change and to transport them in a fraction of the time and lower cost. A shipment that used to take over 45 days will now take 45 hours. That's a game changer. That increases profit. That increases opportunity.

The Lobito Corridor represents the right way to invest in full partnership with a country and its people.

As part of this project, we will install enough clean energy power to power hundreds of thousands of homes, expand high-speed internet across—for millions of Angolans, which is a — as consequential today as electricity was two generations ago.

And we're investing in agriculture and food security, fulfilling the needs of countries without agricultural capacity and expanding opportunities for countries growing the crops; connecting farmers across the Lobito—along the Lobito Corridor to new markets, expanding opportunity and prosperity—you doing that, having the means to do it.

The United States understands how we invest in Africa is as important as how much we invest. In too many places, 10 years after the so-called investment was made, workers are still coming home on a dirt road and without electricity, a village without a school, a city without a hospital, or a country under crushing debt.

We seek a better way: transparent, high-standard, open-access investments that protect workers and the rule of law and the environment. It can be done and will be done.

And, folks, the partnership between Angola and the United States also extends to supporting peace and security in this region and beyond.

President Lourenço, I want to thank him for his leadership and mediation in regional conflicts. I also want to thank him for Angola speaking out against Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine. It matters. It matters when leaders speak out.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, I am in the final weeks of my Presidency. You don't have to clap for that. *[Laughter]* You can if you want.

But I wanted to come to Angola. Although I've been chairman of the Africa America subcommittee for a long time, I had never made it to Angola. Because although I don't know exactly what the future will hold, I know the future runs through Angola, through Africa. I mean it sincerely. I'm not kidding.

I know that any nation that wants to thrive in the next century must work as partners with workers, entrepreneurs, and businesses here in Africa. I know that the connection between our communities, our universities, our sports, our civil societies, our families, our people will only grow deeper. We have to stay focused.

The story of Angola and the United States holds a lesson for the world: two nations with a shared history in evil of human bondage; two nations on opposite sides of the cold war, defining struggle in the late part of the 20th century; and now, two nations standing shoulder to shoulder, working together every day for the mutual benefit of our people.

It's a reminder that no nation need be permanently a—the adversary of another, a testament to the human capacity for reconciliation, and proof that from every—from the horrors of slavery and war, there is a way forward.

So I stand here today—I mean this sincerely—deeply optimistic.

When I—by the way, 20 years ago, when I was a Senator, I had a cranial aneurysm. They—got me to the hospital in time. I remember asking the doctor, "What are my"—he said: "Oh, your chances are good. They're about 30 percent." *[Laughter]* *[Inaudible]* When it was all over, he was deciding whether or not it was congenital or environmental. And I said: "I don't give a damn. I'm here." He said: "You know what your problem is, Senator? You're a congenital optimist." *[Laughter]* I am.

About the possibilities and progress that lie just beyond the horizon. Together, we can and will chart a future worthy of great nations, worthy of the highest aspirations of our people. We just have to remember who we are: We're Angolans; we're Americans.

As I often say in American—to the American people: There's nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we work together. And today, I say to the people of Angola and all the people of Africa, there is nothing beyond our capacity if we do it together.

Thank you. And God bless you and keep you all safe. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And thank you for waiting.

And I've got my hat. *[Laughter]* Thanks, everybody. I really mean it. You're very patient.

Situation in South Korea

Q. Mr. President, anything on South Korea and martial law?

The President. I'm just getting briefed on it. I'm just getting briefed. I haven't heard the details.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:54 p.m. at the National Museum of Slavery. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Wanda Tucker, Vincent Tucker, and Carolita Jones Cope, descendants of William Tucker, the first enslaved child born in the U.S; and former President Donald J. Trump. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Belas, Angola; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Belas, Angola.

Locations: Belas, Angola.

Names: Cope, Carolita Jones; Harris, Kamala D.; Lourenço, João Manuel Gonçalves; Trump, Donald J.; Tucker, Vincent; Tucker, Wanda.

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