

May 21 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

Mayor Lee P. Brown of Houston, TX; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Hong Kong Democratic Party Chair Martin Lee; Prime Minister Zhu Rongji of China; President Chen

Shui-bian of Taiwan; Mayor Wellington E. Webb of Denver, CO; and Georgia Department of Labor Commissioner Michael L. Thurmond.

Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa

May 22, 2000

President Mbeki, Mrs. Mbeki, distinguished members of the South African delegation, we welcome you back to America and to the White House, where we hope, despite the rain, you feel our warm welcome and you feel very much at home.

Sometimes the most important history is made quietly. Last June was such a day, when the people in townships in South Africa waited patiently in long lines to vote for President Mbeki, to elect him the new President of South Africa, and complete the first transition from one democratic government to another.

It reminded us that for all the setbacks, the 1990's were a time of extraordinary liberation for humankind, with democracy spreading to more people in 1999 than it did in 1989, the year the Iron Curtain came down.

President Mbeki, you embody both the courage of the long struggle that brought democracy to South Africa and the vision now needed to define South Africa's critical role in the new century. You are leading your nation and an entire continent forward, supporting peace-making and peacekeeping, fighting against poverty and illiteracy and for economic opportunity.

Our nations have drawn closer together over the last few years, thanks in no small part to the remarkable work that you and Vice President Gore have done together to deepen our ties. Today we will move forward on many fronts, fighting common threats and removing barriers to trade and investment. Last Thursday I was proud to sign into law a bill that will build commerce and investment between us and many other nations in Africa and the Caribbean region.

As I said in South Africa in 1998, I believe in Africa's future, in its progress and its promise. Just one small example: Last year three of the

world's five fastest growing economies were in sub-Saharan Africa.

Of course, terrible problems remain in the Horn of Africa, where a senseless war is again claiming new victims; in the Congo and Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone, in Angola, and across the continent, where so many millions are too burdened by debt and so many innocents are dying of AIDS, TB, and malaria. These are hard challenges without easy answers, and they will test our partnership. But that is what partners are for, to solve big problems together.

The United States can and must work with South Africa and all our friends in Africa to fight poverty, disease, war, famine, and flood. We do so because it is right and because it is in our interests. If we want a world of rising growth and expanding markets, a world in which our security is not threatened by the spread of armed conflict, a world in which bitter ethnic and religious differences are resolved by force of argument, not force of arms, a world in which terrorists and criminals have no place to hide, a world in which economic activity does not destroy the natural environment for our children, a world in which children are healthy and go to school and don't die of AIDS in the streets or fight in wars, then we must be involved in Africa.

That is why we have passed the Africa trade bill, why we support debt relief for the poorest countries, why we have been working to recognize AIDS as a security threat to the United States, and why we have moved to make critical drugs available at affordable prices and to lead an international effort to develop vaccines for AIDS, TB, and malaria.

A few weeks ago, President Mbeki announced a new coat of arms for South Africa. The motto of the coat of arms, written in an ancient African language, means, "people who are different join

together.” That sentiment strikes close to the heart of what it means to be an American, as well as a South African. And it concisely summarizes our goal today and for the future, advancing a partnership between two nations that will always be different but are joined together by a profound commitment to freedom and to our common humanity.

We welcome you here, Mr. President, and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:18 a.m. in the East Room at the White House, where President Mbeki was accorded a formal welcome with full military honors. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mbeki’s wife, Zanele. The President also referred to Public Law 106–200, the Trade and Development Act of 2000. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the President Mbeki.

Exchange With Reporters Following the Welcoming Ceremony for President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa May 22, 2000

HIV/AIDS Pharmaceuticals

Q. President Mbeki, do you think your government could be doing more to distribute the medicines for AIDS in South Africa?

President Mbeki. We are discussing that now with the U.N. aides and the WHO. Our Health Minister has just come back from Geneva. We want to look at all of those things so that we can move more effectively against AIDS.

Q. Is it true that you don’t consider AZT necessarily a good drug in fighting it?

President Mbeki. I’ve never said that.

Q. How does that come about?

President Mbeki. Pure invention. Pure invention.

Q. So your position is what, now?

President Mbeki. I’ve never said that. No, what was said with regard to the anti-retrovirus is that we need to ensure that we are able to cope with dispensing. Because the WHO says when you dispense them, you’ve got to have a strong enough medical infrastructure because of the potential toxicities and counterindications.

You need to be able to supervise the patients close. But no, no, no—so that’s why it’s in the aftermath of the announcement that the pharmaceuticals were reducing the prices. When we sent our Health Minister to Geneva to talk with the WHO—so that we see how to respond to that. No, no, it said that there’s a lot of stuff that’s been written which is not true.

Q. Mr. President, we were asking President Mbeki if he could do more to distribute the

drugs that fight AIDS in South Africa. Do you think he could do more?

President Clinton. Well, we’ve got to get them to him. He’s got to be able to afford them. And that’s what my Executive order was about. And you’ve got these five big pharmaceutical companies now who said they’re going to help, and I think we’re—you know, in the next couple of months, we’ll see if we really can get a break for him. But I’m very encouraged by what those pharmaceutical companies said.

And then, of course, if the Congress will pass my tax proposal to give a big tax credit to them to develop these vaccines, I think that will make a big difference.

Q. So you think it’s a question of money and not his belief in the drugs?

President Clinton. Yes, I think—there are some drugs out there now; we need to get them out there at affordable prices, and then we need to develop the vaccines. And I think we’ll be able to do it.

Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

Q. How close are you on China?

President Clinton. Well, I’m hopeful. But we’re making progress.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, President Mbeki referred to Minister of Health Manto Tshabalala-Msimang of South Africa; and WHO, the World Health Organization. A tape was