Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders Presidential Summit Town Hall
July 28, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello! Hello, everybody. Thank you. Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. We're just getting started here. Well, hello, everybody. Welcome to Washington. The—I know most of you are visiting our country for the first time, so on behalf of the American people, welcome to the United States of America. We are thrilled to have you here. And to everybody who's watching online across Africa or at watch parties or following through social media, you are a part of this too, and you're glad—we're very glad that you're with us.

And can everybody please give Faith a big round of applause for the great introduction. I have to say, Faith didn't seem very intimidated by the setting. [*Laughter*] She seemed not lacking in confidence. [*Laughter*] And she's doing great work in South Africa to empower young peoples and young entrepreneurs, especially women.

Now, I'm not here to give a big speech. The whole idea of a town hall is for me to be able to hear from you. But first, I want to speak briefly about why I believe so strongly in all of you being here today.

Next week, I'll host a truly historic event, the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, where nearly 50 Presidents and Prime Ministers attend from just about all of your countries. It will be the largest gathering any American President has ever hosted with African heads of state and government. And the summit reflects a principle that has guided my approach to Africa ever since I became President: that the security and prosperity and justice that we seek in the world cannot be achieved without a strong and prosperous and self-reliant Africa.

And even as we deal with crises and challenges in other parts of the world that often dominate our headlines, even as we acknowledge the real hardships that so many Africans face every day, we have to make sure that we're seizing the extraordinary potential of today's Africa, which is the youngest and fastest growing of the continents.

So next week's summit will focus on how we can continue to build a new model of partnership between America and Africa, a partnership of equals that focuses on your capacity to expand opportunity and strengthen democracy and promote security and peace. But this can't be achieved by government alone. It demands the active engagement of citizens, especially young people.

And so that's why, 4 years ago, I launched the Young African Leaders Initiative to make sure that we're tapping into the incredible talent and creativity of young Africans like you. Since then, we've partnered with thousands of young people across the continent, empowering them with the skills and the training and technology they need to start new businesses, to spark change in their communities, to promote education and health care and good governance.

And last year in South Africa, at a town hall like this in Soweto—some of you were there—I announced the next step, which was the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. The objective was to give young Africans the opportunity to come to the United States and develop their skills as the next generation of leaders in civil society and business and government.

And the response was overwhelming. Across the continent, young men and women set out on a journey. In remote villages with no phones and Internet, they navigated the backroads, and they traveled by bus and train to reach larger towns and cities, just to get an online application for the program. One young woman from rural Zimbabwe took a 5-hour bus ride, then another 6-hour bus ride, then another 7-hour bus ride—a 2-day journey—just to get her interview.

And ultimately, some 50,000 extraordinary young Africans applied. And today they're heart—they're at the heart of what we're

calling our YALI Network, the online community across Africa that's sharing their ideas and forging new collaborations to realize the change that they seek. And I want everybody out there in the YALI Network to know that you're the foundation of our partnership with Africa's youth.

So today we're thrilled to welcome you, our Washington Fellows, to an exchange program unlike any other that America has ever had with Africa. And among your ranks is that young woman from Zimbabwe who endured all those bus rides. So we want to welcome Abbigal Muleya. Where's Abbigal? Where's Abbigal? Where is she? There's Abbigal. Hey! [*Laughter*] That's a lot of bus rides. [*Laughter*]

Now, I do have a first item of business. As I said, I launched this fellowship in Soweto, not far from the original home of Nelson Mandela. And the spirit of this program reflects Madiba's optimism, his idealism, his belief in what he called "the endless heroism of youth." And so today, with the blessing of the Mandela family, to whom we're so grateful, we are proud to announce that the new name of this program is the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. So you're the first class of Mandela Washington Fellows. [*Applause*] That's right.

So, now, I know all of you have been busy—all of you have been busy at some of America's top colleges and universities. You've been learning how to build a grassroots organization and how to run a business and how to manage an institution. As one of you said, "My brain has been bubbling with all sorts of ideas." And I know you've also been developing your own ideas for meeting the challenges that we'll address at next week's summit. And I wanted you to know, I've read some of the recommendations that were produced at each university and college, and I thought they were outstanding pieces of work. And that's what I want you to hear today: your ideas, your vision for Africa.

Here at this summit, you're going to engage with some of our Nation's leading voices, including someone who I know you can't wait to see, which is Michelle Obama, because the—[*applause*]. But many Members of Congress, who are strong supporters of this program, are also here. Where are the Members of Congress? I know that we've got a few. There you are. So some outstanding Members of Congress are here. You'll get a chance to meet some of them. And I know some of you are headed off to internships in some of our Nation's leading companies and organizations. One of you said, "I will take what I've learned here and put it into practice back home." And that's the whole idea.

And I want to say, by the way, I took some pictures with some of the university officials who had hosted all of you, and uniformly, they said they could not have been more impressed with all of you and what a great job you did in engaging and taking advantage of the program. So thank you.

I know you've also been experiencing America as well, the places that make us who we are, including my hometown of Chicago. You've experienced some of our traditions, like a block party. [*Laughter*] You've experienced some of our food; Faith said she ate a lot of Texas barbecue when she was in Austin.

Audience members. Woo!

The President. You really liked that barbecue, huh? [*Laughter*] So you've got the whole Longhorn thing going on and all that? [*Laughter*]

And Americans have been learning from you as well, because every interaction is a chance for Americans to see the Africa that so often is overlooked in the media: the Africa that is innovative and growing and dynamic. And a new generation, all of you, on Facebook and Twitter, and creating new ways to connect, like Yookos and MXit. I see some of you tweeting this town hall—[*laughter*]—although mostly, I see these guys shifting into the seat over and over again so everybody can get a picture. [*Laughter*] Don't think I didn't notice. [*Laughter*] You all just—you need to stay in your chairs. [*Laughter*] Everybody thinks they're slick.

So the point is, our young leaders—our Young African Leaders Initiative is a long-term investment in all of you and in Africa and the future that we can build together. And today I

want to announce some next steps that I think are important.

First, given the extraordinary demand for this fellows program, we're going to double it so that in 2 years, we'll welcome a thousand Mandela Washington fellows to the United States every year. The—so that's good news.

Second, we'll do even more to support young entrepreneurs with new grants to help you start a business or a nonprofit, and training thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs in smaller towns and rural areas. And given the success for our annual Global Entrepreneurship Summit, I can announce that next year's summit will be hosted for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, which I think is going to be terrific.

Third, we're launching a whole new set of tools to empower young Africans through our YALI network: new online courses and mentoring, new ways to meet up and network across Africa and around the world, new training sessions and meetings with experts on how to launch startups. And it all begins today. And to get started, all of you—all you have to do is to go to yali.state.gov—yali.state.gov—and that will give you information about how you can access all these resources going forward.

And finally, we're creating new regional leadership centers across Africa. So we're joining with American universities, African institutions, and private sector partners like Microsoft and MasterCard Foundation—we want to thank the two of them; they're really helping to finance this. So give Microsoft and MasterCard Foundation a round of applause. Starting next year, young Africans can come to these centers to network and access the latest technology and get training in management and entrepreneurship. And we're starting in Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya. And we aim to help tens of thousands of young Africans access the skills and resources they need to put their ideas into action.

So the point of all this is, we believe in you. I believe in you. I believe in every one of you who are doing just extraordinary things, like Adepeju Jaiyeoba. In Nigeria—there's Adepeju—in Nigeria, she saw a close friend die during childbirth. She now helps train birth attendants and delivers kits with sterile supplies, and helping to save the lives of countless mothers and their babies. So we want to thank Adepeju. We want her to save even more lives.

Or, to give you another example, Robert Nkwangu from Uganda. So there's Robert. So Robert is deaf, but even though he can't hear, he can see that the stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities must end. He's been their champion. He's standing up for the rights in schools and on the job. So thank you, Robert. We want to be your partner in standing up for the universal rights of all people.

I believe in Mame Bousso Ndiaye. [*Applause*] Right? So, in Senegal, she's taking a stand against the human trafficking that condemns too many women and girls to forced labor and sexual slavery. She runs an academy that gives them education and skills to find a job and start new lives. And so we are so proud of you. Thank you for the good work that you're doing. We want to help you help these young women and girls to the kind of future of dignity that we want for every woman all across the continent and all around the world.

And I believe in Hastings Mkandawire. Where's Hastings? In rural Malawi, he saw towns in darkness, without electricity. So now he gathers scrap metal, builds generators on his porch, takes them down to the stream for power, delivers electricity so farmers can irrigate their crops and children can study at night. Hastings, thank you. We want to help you power Africa.

So—and everybody here has a story, and we believe in all of you. We see what's possible. And we see the vision that all of you have, not because of what you've seen here in America, but because what you've already done back home, what you see in each other and what you see in yourself.

So Sobel Ngom, from Senegal. Where's—so Sobel has a wonderful quote. He has a wonderful quote. He said: "Here, I have met Africa, the [Africa] I have always believed in. She is beautiful. She is young. She is full of talent and motivation and ambition." And that's a good description. And being here with all of you and learning together and working together and

dreaming together has only strengthened his determination, he says, to realize "my aspirations for my country and my continent."

So to Sobel and to all of you and to everyone across Africa who joins our Young Leaders Initiative, I want to thank you for inspiring us with your talent and your motivation and your ambition. You've got great aspirations for your countries and your continent. And as you build that brighter future that you imagine, I want to make sure that the United States of America is going to be your friend and partner every step of the way.

So thank you very much, everybody. Let's get a few questions and comments in this town hall. All right?

All right. So, now, okay, I know this is kind of a rowdy crowd. [*Laughter*] First of all, I want everybody to sit down. [*Laughter*] Sit down. Now, I'm not going to be able to call on everybody, so just a couple of rules. Number one, don't start standing up and waving or shouting. Just raise your hand, and I will try to select from the audience, and I'll try to take as many questions as possible. So let's keep the questions—or comments relatively brief so that—and I will try to give a brief answer, although if you ask me what are we going to do about ending war—[*laughter*]—then that may require a longer answer. So we'll see how it goes. So that's rule number one.

Rule number two, we should have microphones in the audience, and so wait—when I call on you, wait until the microphone comes. The attendant will hold it in front of you. You can answer. Please introduce yourself, tell us what country you're from, and ask your question or make your remark. Number two, just to make sure it's fair, we're going to go boy, girl, boy, girl. [*Laughter*] In fact, you know what—in fact, we're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy. [*Laughter*] That's what we're going to do. Because one of the things we want to teach about Africa is how strong the women are and how we've got to empower women.

All right? So let's see who we're going to call on first. This young lady right here. Right here. Yes. So wait until the mike is there. Here, there's somebody right behind you who's got the microphone. Introduce yourself, and welcome.

Entrepreneurship

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. My name is Tsakani Nola Mashaba. I'm from South Africa. And my question is, previously Nelson Mandela has inspired the foundation of the Southern African Fund for Enterprises. It has run for two decades, and it has since been stopped. Is there any chance to develop another fund for enterprises in Africa?

The President. Well, it's a great question. One of the things that's been interesting in not only some of the platforms that you developed at your universities, but also during my trips to Africa is the degree to which young Africans are less interested in aid and more interested in how can they create opportunity through business and entrepreneurship and trade. Not to say that we do not need to deal with very serious challenges in terms of poverty. We need to make sure that we are continuing to work on behalf of the least of these. But what I think everybody recognizes is that if you want sustained development and sustained opportunity and sustained self-determination, then the key is to own what is produced and to be able to create jobs and opportunity organically and indigenously and then be able to meet the world on equal terms.

So part of the challenge in entrepreneurship is financing. And for so many individuals across the continent, it's just very difficult to get that initial startup money. And the truth is, is that in many communities around Africa, it's not that you need so much, but you need something, that little seed capital.

And so what we'd like to do is to work with programs that are already existing, to find out where are the gaps in terms of financing, and then to make sure that we are utilizing the resources that we have in the most intelligent way possible to target young entrepreneurs to create small and medium-sized businesses all across the continent that, hopefully, grow into large businesses. And if we're supplementing that kind of financing with the training and networking that may be available through

YALI, then we could see the blossoming of all kinds of entrepreneurial activities all across the continent that eventually grow into larger businesses.

And so we are very interested in this. This will be a primary focus of the summit that we have with the African leaders next week: How do we make sure that financing is available, and, by the way, how do we make sure that the financing does not just go to those who are already at the top? How do we make sure it filters down? You shouldn't have to be the son of somebody or the daughter of somebody. You should be able to get—if you've got a good idea, you should be able to test that idea and be judged on your own merits.

And that's where I think we can help bypass what oftentimes is—in, sadly, too many countries—a system in which you have to know somebody in order to be able to finance your ideas.

One thing I do want to say, though: Keep in mind, even in the United States, if you're starting a business, it's always hard getting financing. So there are a lot of U.S. entrepreneurs and small-businesspeople, when they're starting off, they're borrowing from their brothers and their sisters and begging and scratching and taking credit cards, and they're running up debt. And inherently, there is risk involved. And so I don't want to give anybody the illusion who is out there starting a business or wanting to launch a business that it's going to be easy. It will not be.

But there are ways where we can make a difference. And oftentimes, particularly in rural areas of Africa, you don't need a lot of capital to get started, right? So you may be able—if you buy one piece of equipment that can increase yields for a whole bunch of farmers in that community, and then the profits—additional profits—that they make you now—now allows you to buy two pieces of equipment and then four and then eight, you can grow fairly rapidly because the baseline of capital in that community may be relatively low. So you don't necessarily have huge barriers of entry. You just have to make sure that you have that initial capital.

But of course, in communities like that, even a small amount of capital can be hard to come by. And that's why making sure that this is a top priority of our efforts is something that we'll really emphasize. Okay?

All right, so let's see, this is a gentleman's turn. I'm going to call on this guy just because he's so tall. [*Laughter*] I always like—I like height. [*Laughter*] There you go. All right, go ahead.

Governance and Rule of Law in African Nations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm El Hadji Abou Gueyefrom Senegal. President Obama with President of—the first President of the United State of Africa. I would like to know, can you share the two important issues you will discuss with the first President of the United Nation of Africa?

The President. The—I'm sorry, I'm the first African American President of the United States.

Q. No, I ask if——

The President. They—but I wasn't sure of——

Q. Okay. Okay. Africa——

Audience members. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Heads of state? What are the top two issues that I'm going to be discussing when we're in the summit tomorrow?

Q. The first—if Africa becomes the United State of Africa——

The President. Oh, I see.

Q. ——and you get the chance to meet the first President of the first United State of Africa.

The President. I see, okay. All right, so this is sort of like a—it's kind of an intellectual exercise. If I were to discuss—[*laughter*]—no, no, now I understand your question.

Q. It's clear?

The President. It's an interesting question. The idea is if somehow Africa unified into a United States of Africa, what would be something that I would say to him or her?

Q. First president. Her or him, yes. [*Laughter*]

The President. That—you know, I think the thing that I would emphasize first and foremost is the issue of governance. Now, sometimes, this is an issue that raises some sensitivities because I think people feel like, who's the

United States to tell us how to govern? We have different systems. We have different traditions. What may work for the United States may not work for us. Oh, and by the way, the United States, we don't see that Congress is always cooperating so well, and your system is not perfect.

I understand all that. So let's acknowledge all that. What I will say is this, that regardless of the resources a country possesses, regardless of how talented the people are, if you do not have a basic system of rule of law, of respect for civil rights and human rights, if you do not give people a credible, legitimate way to work through the political process to express their aspirations, if you don't respect basic freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, if there are not laws in place in which everybody is equal under the law so that there's not one set of rules for the well-connected and another set of rules for ordinary people, if you do not have an economic system that is transparent and accountable so that people trust that if they work hard, they will be rewarded for their work, and corruption is rooted out—if you don't have those basic mechanisms, it is very rare for a country to succeed.

I will go further than that: That country will not succeed over the long term. It may succeed over the short term because it may have natural resources that it can extract, and it can generate enough money to then distribute and create patronage networks. But over time, that country will decline.

And if you look at examples around the world, you'll have a country like Singapore, which has nothing; it's a small, tiny, city-state with not a lot of—it has no real natural resources, and yet it's taken off. And you have other countries, which I won't mention—[*laughter*]—that have incredible resources, but because there's not a basic system of rule of law that people have confidence in, it never takes off, and businesses never take root.

And so what I would emphasize is governance as a starting point. It's not alone sufficient. And you then also have to have an education system that's in place. You then also have to have, over time, infrastructure. And there are all kinds of other elements that are necessary. But if you don't have the basic premise that ordinary citizens can succeed based on their individual efforts, that they don't have to pay a bribe in order to start a business or even get a telephone, that they won't be shaken down when they're driving down the street because the police officers aren't getting paid enough and this is the accepted way to supplement their income—if you don't have those things in place, then over time, there's no trust in the society. People don't have confidence that things are working the way that they should. And so then, everybody starts trying to figure out, okay, what's my angle? How am I going to get my thing? And it creates a culture in which you can't really take off. Right?

And that's—look, you're never going to eliminate a hundred percent of corruption. You're never—here in the United States, occasionally we have to throw people in jail for taking money for contracts or having done favors for politicians. All that's true. But the difference here in the United States—and it's true in many of the more developed, industrialized countries—is, that's more the aberration rather than the norm.

I mean, the truth is, here in the United States, if you want to start a business, you go ahead, and you file a paper, you can incorporate. You might have to pay a fee of $50 or $100 or whatever it ends up being, and that's it. You've got your business. Now, the business might not be making any money at that point; you still got to do a whole bunch of stuff to succeed. But the point is, is that basically, rule of law is observed. That's the norm. That's what happens 95 percent of the time.

And that's, I think, where you have to start. And that's where young people, I think, have to have high expectations for their leadership. And don't be fooled by this notion that, well, we have a different way, an African way. Well, no. [*Laughter*] The African way is not that you suddenly have a—you've been in office, and then suddenly, you have a Swiss bank account of $2 billion. That's not the African way. That's not—[*applause*].

And part of rule of law, by the way, is also that leaders eventually give up power over time. It doesn't have to be the same way all the time. But if you have entrenched leadership forever, then what happens over time is, it just—you don't get new ideas and new blood. And it is inevitable, I think, sometimes that rule of law becomes less and less observed because people start being more concerned about keeping their positions than doing the right thing.

So, okay, great question, even though it took me a while to understand it. [*Laughter*]

So it's a young lady's turn. Let me make sure that I'm not restricting myself to—how about that young lady right there. Right there. You, yes, you. Yes. [*Laughter*] Hold on a second, the microphone is coming.

Gender Equality in African Nations

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. My name is Changu Siwawa, and I'm from Botswana. I just wanted to find out, how committed is the U.S. to assisting Africa in closing gender inequalities, which are contributing to gender-based violence, which it threatens the achievement of many Millennium Development Goals, such as access to universal education, eradicating HIV and AIDS?

The President. Well, listen, I am—you will not find anybody more committed than I am to this issue, and let me tell you why.

First of all, I was mentioning earlier, if you look comparatively at countries around the world, what societies succeed, which ones don't, one of the single best measures of whether a country succeeds or not is how it treats its women. And if you think about it, it makes sense, because, first of all, women are half your population. So, if you have a team—we just finished the World Cup, right—if you have a soccer team, what you all call a football team, and you go out, and the other side has a full team, and you send out half your team, how are you going to do? You will not do as well.

If you are not empowering half of your population, that means you have half as few possible scientists, half as few possible engineers. You are crippling your own development unnecessarily. So that's point number one.

Point number two is, if you educate and empower and respect a mother, then you are educating the children, right? So, with a man, you educate him, yes, it's okay. [*Laughter*] A woman, you educate her, and suddenly, you've got an entire village, an entire region, an entire country suddenly is becoming educated.

So this is an absolute priority for us. And what we—and we'll be discussing this with the heads of state and government that we see next week. And we've seen some progress on some fronts, but this is where sometimes traditions can get in the way.

And as many of you know, my father was from Kenya, and—[*applause*]—that's the Kenyan contingent. [*Laughter*] But I think what applies to Kenya is true and applies to many of the countries in Africa—and there—this is not unique to Africa, we see this in other parts of the world—some of the old ways of gender relations might have made sense in a particular setting. Right? So, in Kenya, for example, in the Luo tribe, polygamy existed. It was based on the idea that women had their own compounds, they had their own land, and so they were empowered in that area to be self-sufficient. And then, urbanization happened; suddenly, the men may be traveling to the city, and suddenly, there is another family in the city, and the women who were left back in the villages may not be empowered in the same way. And so what worked then might not work today, in fact, does not work today. And if you seek to—if you try to duplicate traditions that were based on an entirely different economy and an entirely different society and entirely different expectations, well, that's going to break down. It's not going to work.

So, as a continent, you have to update and create new traditions. And that's where young people come in. You don't have to accept what's the old ways of doing things. You can respect the past and respect traditions while recognizing they have to be adapted to a new age.

Now, I have to say, there are some traditions that just have to be gotten rid of, and there's no excuse for them. Female genital mutilation—

I'm sorry, I don't consider that a tradition worth hanging on to. I think that's a tradition that is barbaric and should be eliminated. Violence towards women—I don't care for that tradition. I'm not interested in it. It needs to be eliminated.

So part of the task is to find what traditions are worth hanging on to and what traditions you've got to get rid of. I mean, there was a tradition in medicine that if you were sick, they would bleed you. [*Laughter*] That's a bad tradition. We discovered, let's try other things, like medicine. [*Laughter*] So we don't have to cling on to things that just don't work. And subjugating women does not work, and the society will fail as a consequence.

So everything we do, every program that we have—any education program that we have, any health program that we have, any small business or economic development program that we have—we will write into it a gender equality component to it. This is not just going to be some side note. This will be part of everything that we do.

And the last point I'm going to make: In order for this to be successful, all the men here have to be just as committed to empowering women as the women are. That's important. So don't think that this is just a job for women, to worry about women's issues. The men have to worry about it. And if you're a strong man, you should not feel threatened by strong women. So—[*applause*].

All right. So we've got gentleman's turn. This gentleman in this bright tie right here. This is a—go ahead.

Public Health Progress in African Nations/Debt Relief for African Nations/Legacy of Colonialism/Economic Development in African Nations

Q. Thank you, Your Excellency. My name is Didas Mzirai, and I'm coming from Kenya.

The President. Hey, *habari?*

Q. Mzuri sana. Asante sana for your opportunity.

Africa is losing her people to starvation and diseases, which are otherwise curable. And this is largely because our governments are establishing very huge debts to the G–8 countries. As a global leader in the family of nations, when will the U.S. lead the other G–8 countries in forgiving Africa these debts so that our governments can be in a position to deliver and provide essential services, like social, health care, and the infrastructural development services to our people? Thank you.

The President. Well—thank you. Well, let me make a couple of points on this. First of all, I think it's important to recognize on issues of health the significant progress that has been made, because I think sometimes we are so properly focused on the challenges that we forget to remind ourselves how far we've come. And when you know how far you've come, it gives you confidence about how much further you can go.

So, over the last 20 years, HIV occurrence has been cut in half in Africa—half. Tuberculosis and malaria deaths have been reduced by 40 percent and 30 percent, respectively; 50-percent fewer women die giving birth; 50 million children's lives have been spared. And most importantly, now what we're doing is not just providing assistance through programs like PEPFAR, but we're also empowering governments themselves to begin to set up public health infrastructure and networks and training nurses and clinicians and specialists so that it becomes self-sufficient. So we're making progress.

Now, I think there is a legitimate discussion to be had around debt forgiveness. And in meetings with what now is the G–7, I just want to let you know—[*laughter*]—but that's a whole other topic that—[*laughter*]—we don't want to get too far afield—I think there's genuine openness to how can we help make sure that countries are not saddled with debts that may have been squandered by past leaders, but now hamstrung countries—are making countries unable to get out from under the yoke of those debts.

The only thing I will do, though, is I will challenge the notion that the primary reason that there's been a failure of service delivery is because of onerous debt imposed by the West. Let me say something that may be somewhat controversial. And I'm older than all of you;

that I know. [*Laughter*] By definition, if you're my age, you're not supposed to be in this program. [*Laughter*] You lied about your age. [*Laughter*] When I was a college student, issues of dependency and terms of trade and the legacy of colonialism, those were all topics of great, fervent discussion. And there is no doubt that, dating back to the colonial era, you can trace many of the problems that have plagued the continent, whether it's how lines were drawn without regard to natural boundaries and tribal and ethnic relationships; whether you look at all the resources that were extracted and the wealth that was extracted without any real return to the nature of trade as it developed in the sixties and the seventies, so that value was never actually produced in country, but was sent somewhere else. There are all kinds of legitimate arguments you can look at in terms of history that impeded African development.

But at some point, we have to stop looking somewhere else for solutions, and you have to start looking for solutions internally. And as powerful as history is, and you need to know that history, at some point, you have to look to the future and say, okay, we didn't get a good deal then, but let's make sure that we're not making excuses for not going forward.

And the truth is, is that there's not a single country in Africa—and by the way, this is true for the United States as well—that, with the resources it had, could not be doing better. So there are a lot of countries that are generating a lot of wealth. I'm not going to name any, but you can guess. This is a well-educated crowd. There are a lot of countries that are generating a lot of income, have a lot of natural resources, but aren't putting that money back into villages to educate children. There are a lot of countries where the leaders have a lot of resources, but the money is not going back to provide health clinics for young mothers.

So yes, I think it's important for Western countries and advanced countries to look at past practices. If loans have been made to countries to—that weren't put into productive enterprises by those leaders at that time, those leaders may be long gone, but countries are still unable to dig themselves out from under those debts—can we strategically in pin-point fashion find ways to assist and provide some relief? That's a legitimate discussion. But do not think that that is the main impediment, at this point, to why we have not seen greater progress in many countries, because there's enough resources there in country, even if debts being serviced, to do better than we're doing in many cases. All right?

Okay, so it's a young lady's turn. I haven't gotten anybody way back in the back there. So how about that young lady right there with the glasses. Yes, right there. There you go.

African Growth and Opportunity Act/Trade Promotion Efforts

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. My name is Zo.

The President. Zo? I like that name.

Q. Yes, from Madagascar.

The President. From?

Q. Madagascar.

The President. Madagascar.

Q. It's a great honor for me, Mr. President, to thank you on behalf of the Malagasy people to reintegrate Madagascar last month in the AGOA. And my question is, as it will end on 2015, we will have—we want to have your confirmation right here what will happen after 2015. We all know that the AGOA was a great way to decrease youth unemployment in our country, so what will happen after this, the end? Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. So AGOA, for those of you—I think everybody here is probably aware, this is one of the primary tools we have to promote trade between the United States and many African countries. It's set to expire. There's a negotiation process taking place as we speak. More progress will be made next week. I think that we've learned some lessons about what works and what doesn't through the first stage of AGOA. In some cases, what we've discovered is, is that many countries can't—even if they have no tariff barriers that they're experiencing, they still have problems in terms of getting their goods to market. And so part of what we're trying to do is to find ways in which

we can lower some of the other barriers to export for African countries, not just the tariffs issue, but how can we make sure that there is greater transportation networks, how can we make sure that trade financing is in place, what are the other mechanisms that may inhibit exports from African countries. So that's the first thing.

On a separate track, part of what we're also trying to figure out is, how can we promote inter-African trade? Because so often—and this does relate to a legacy of the past and colonialism—you have strong infrastructure to send flowers from Kenya to Paris, but it's very hard to send tea from Kenya down to Tanzania; much closer, but the infrastructure is not built. And so part of what we have to do is to try to find ways to integrate Africa.

Much of that is a question of infrastructure. Some of it has to do with coordinating regulatory systems between countries. We're embarking on some experiments starting in East Africa to see if we can get Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania——

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. ——see, you guys know all of them. [*Laughter*] We're starting to work with these countries to see, can we get some blocks of effective trading taking place?

Because, look, obviously there's going to be a certain market for certain goods—I mentioned flowers from Kenya. The market—that's primarily going to be in some of the wealthier countries. But there are going to be some goods that it's going to be much easier to sell. If I'm a Kenyan businessman, it's going to be easier for me to sell my goods to a Tanzanian or a Ugandan than it is for me to try to compete with Nike or Apple in the United States. Right?

And historically, when you look at how trade develops—if you look at Asia, for example, which obviously has grown extraordinarily fast—a huge volume of that trade is within the region first, and then over time, that becomes a launching pad from which to trade globally.

So this is an area where I think we can also provide some assistance and help. But my—just to answer directly your question, we are very strongly committed to making sure that AGOA is reauthorized. And obviously, we've got a bunch of Members of Congress here who care about this deeply as well. Okay.

How much time do we have, by the way? I just want to make sure—saying, 1 hour. [*Laughter*] Okay, I think we've got time for two more questions.

Audience members. Aww.

The President. Well, I'm sorry, but—[*laughter*]. The—so it's a gentleman's turn. Let me see. This gentleman in the white right here. That guy right there. Hold on one second, let's get a microphone on him.

Antitrust Law in African Nations

Q. Hi, I'm James Mulbah from Liberia. It is a pleasure meeting you, Mr. President. My question has to do with the issue of antitrust law. You will be meeting our leaders next week. Will you discuss the issue of antitrust law that will protect young entrepreneurs in Africa? If not, are you willing to include it on your agenda, please, to solve our problems back home? Thank you.

The President. Well, obviously, each country is different, and I'll be honest with you, I'm not familiar with the antitrust laws in every country. But what I would certainly commit to doing is to talk about antitrust in the broader context of what I said at the beginning after maybe the first question, and that is the issue of rule of law and how it interacts with the economy.

If you have monopolies or collusion between a few companies that create artificial barriers to new entrants, then economic theory will tell you that invariably, that is inefficient. It means consumers are going to pay more for worse products. It means those companies can concentrate more and more wealth without actually improving what they produce. And over time, the economy stagnates.

And here in the United States we had a history of huge, big, corporations controlling huge sectors of the economy. And over time, we put in laws to break up those monopolies and to create laws to guard against artificial monopolies that prevented competition.

So antitrust is one element of a broader set of laws and principles that every country should be adopting with the basic notion that, look, if you're successful—if you are a company like Apple that innovated and—or a company like Microsoft that came up with a new concept—you should be able to get big and you should be able to be successful, and those who founded it, like Bill Gates, should be wealthy. But what you also want to make sure of is, the next generation—the Googles or the Facebooks—that they can be successful too in that space. And that means that you have to make sure that those who got there first aren't closing the door behind them, which all too often, I think, happens in many countries, not just in African countries.

So you make an excellent point, and we'll make sure that that's incorporated into the broader discussion.

Okay, this young lady right here. Yes, because she looks so nice. [*Laughter*]

Young African Leaders Initiative/Youth Empowerment in African Nations

Q. Thank you very much. My name is Josephine Kulea. I'm from Kenya.

The President. I know. We've got a Masai sister right here. [*Laughter*] That's it. Go ahead.

Q. Thank you for this great initiative for the young people, and thank you for believing in the young people.

The upcoming summit with the Presidents, I know you're going to ask them on engagement of the young people back in their—in our countries. And my concern will be, how will you be able to engage them to commit to their promises? Because I know they're going to promise you that. Thank you.

The President. Well—[*applause*]. All right, don't get carried away here. [*Laughter*] Well, look, part of what we've done here by building this YALI network that we're going to be doubling over the next couple of years is, we're going directly to the young people and creating these networks and these opportunities. And I—what we're already seeing, I think, is many countries are excited by this. They're saying, you know what, this is something that can be an empowering tool for us, so let's take advantage of it.

There are going to be some that may feel somewhat threatened by it. There's no doubt about that. But the good thing is, we will be creating this network; there are a whole bunch of people who are following this online, who are following it on social media. We'll have these regional centers. You will help to make sure that some of these promises are observed, because the whole continent of young people is going to be paying attention, and we'll be able to see which countries are really embracing this opportunity to get new young people involved and which ones are ignoring this promise.

And so I will say to every one of these leaders, you need to take advantage of the most important resource you have, and that's the amazing youth in these countries. But you're going to have to also help to hold them accountable collectively across countries, and that's part of why this network can be so important.

So I know this is sad, but I have to go.

Audience members. Aww.

The President. I have other work to do. [*Laughter*] The good news is, you've got all these really amazing people who are still going to be meeting with you and talking with you. And most importantly, this is—what an amazing opportunity it is for all of you to get to know each other and to talk and to compare ideas and share concepts going forward.

The main message I want to leave you with is that, in the same way I'm inspired by you, you should be inspired by each other; that Africa has enormous challenges, the world has enormous challenges, but I tell the young people that intern in the White House—and I usually meet with them at the end of their internship after 6 months—I always tell them, despite all the bad news that you read about or you see on television, despite all the terrible things that happen in places around the world, if you had to choose a time in world history in which to be born, and you didn't know who you were or what your status or position would be, you'd choose today. Because for all the

difficulties, the world has made progress and Africa is making progress. And it's growing. And there are fewer conflicts, and there's less war. And there's more opportunity, and there's greater democracy, and there are greater—there's greater observance of human rights.

And progress sometimes can be slow, and it can be frustrating. And sometimes, you take two steps forward, and then you take one step back. But the great thing about being young is, you are not bound by the past, and you can shape the future. And if all of you work hard and work together and remain confident in your possibilities and aren't deterred when you suffer a setback, but you get back up and you dust yourself off and you go back at it, I have no doubt that you're going to leave behind for the next generation and the generation after that an Africa that is strong and vibrant and prosperous and is ascendant on the world stage.

So I can't wait to see what all of you do. Good luck.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mandela Washington Fellows Nomzamo Faith Mangope, Abbigal Muleya, Adepeju Opeyemi Jaiyeoba, Robert Nkwangu, Sokhna Mame Bousso Ndiaye, Hastings Mkandawire, and Sobel Aziz Alfred Marie Ngom; and William H. Gates III, chairman, Microsoft Corp.

Remarks on Presenting the National Medal of Arts and the National Humanities Medal

July 28, 2014

Hello, everybody. Hello! Hey! Thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat.

Well, welcome to the White House. It has been 200 years since Dolley Madison saved the portrait of George Washington that hangs in this room from an advancing British Army. So I guess you could say that the White House has always supported the arts. [*Laughter*] I'm glad to say that Michelle has never had to save any paintings that I know of, from Bo or otherwise. [*Laughter*] But we do believe in celebrating extraordinarily talented Americans and their achievements in the arts and in the humanities.

So I want to thank Jane Chu and Bro Adams, the Chairs of the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment of the Humanities, for their outstanding work. And I want to thank Members of Congress, including a great champion of the arts, Nancy Pelosi, for joining us this afternoon.

The late, great Maya Angelou once said, "A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song." Each of the men and women that we honor today has a song, literally, in some cases. For others, it's a talent or a drive or a passion that they just had to share with the world.

To our honorees: Like most creative and brainy people, you did not cultivate your song for accolades or applause. If there were no medal for your work, I expect you'd still be out there designing buildings and making movies and digging through archives and asking tough questions in interviews.

But we do honor you today because your accomplishments have enriched our lives and reveal something about ourselves and about our country. We can never take for granted the flash of insight that comes from watching a great documentary or reading a great memoir or novel or seeing an extraordinary piece of architecture. We can't forget the wonder we feel when we stand before an incredible work of art or the world of memories we find unlocked with a simple movement or a single note.

So the moments you help create—moments of understanding or awe or joy or sorrow—they add texture to our lives. They are not incidental to the American experience; they are central to it, they are essential to it. So we not only congratulate you this afternoon, we thank