

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:37 p.m. at the Sheraton Addis hotel. In his remarks, he re-

ferred to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa.

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa July 27, 2015

Prime Minister Hailemariam. Your Excellency, the President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: In the history of the relationship by Ethiopia and the United States of America, this is an exceptional occasion. Never before did we have the opportunity to be able to welcome a sitting President of the United States for an official visit to Ethiopia.

And, Mr. President, we welcome you and all the members of your delegation to Ethiopia with open arms. Your visit is a mark of the long friendship between our two countries and our two peoples, a friendship that I am certain will be further enhanced in the future. It shows the strengths and depths of the diplomatic and cultural relations we enjoy today and underlines our hopes for the future.

Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, our links were formally established at the beginning of the last century when a treaty of commerce was signed during the reign of Emperor Menelik and President Theodore Roosevelt administration in 1903. Since then, and even earlier, the United States provided an inspiration for the advancement of science and technology and, indeed, of democracy and good governance.

Ethiopia, similarly, as the only surviving vessel of freedom and independence in Africa, offered an inspiration to many in America. It was a source of an inspiration for a great African American thinker and philosopher, Du Bois, as well as more recently, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And many saw a source of enlightenment in the spirit of Ethiopia. They saw the courageous struggle of Ethiopia as the symbol of the struggle of the whole community of Africans across the world for civil liberty, equality, and freedom.

Ours is a relationship established on the basis of mutual understanding, respect, and dignity and matured in the struggle against fascism. The role of the United States to the struggle can only be described as historic. People all over the country protested against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. You raised funds and sent medical supplies. People in New York, Harlem, Oklahoma, Texas, and many other cities paraded in support of Ethiopia. Thousands offered to enlist to fight for us. And even after the war, many more came to Ethiopia to help in our post-war reconstruction.

It is perhaps appropriate to single out one person, as I feel this is an appropriate moment to mention one African American hero who grew up in Mississippi during the early 1920s and came to Ethiopia in 1935 to help us in our struggle against fascism and colonial aggression. Colonel John Robinson was, I believe, one of the first Americans to take up arms against fascism. Having earlier established an aviation school in Alabama, Colonel Robinson was largely responsible for founding the Ethiopian Air Force during the Italian invasion. Called here the Brown Condor of Ethiopia, he then became the first commander of the Air Force.

He was a wonderful example of those Americans who did so actively support Ethiopia both in time of peace and conflict. And here, let me also mention the exemplary dedication displayed by your youth in the Peace Corps, both in the 1960s, all over the way through today.

In this context, let me also remember all those Americans who have given their lives to Ethiopia, not least the late Congressman Mickey Leland who worked so hard to build the relationship between our two countries on the basis of dignity, faith and hope. He would have very much appreciated this visit as a symbol of

the friendship that has been built up over the years and which he did so much to encourage.

We, and indeed other Africans, who owe very real gratitude to your administration and the Members of Congress for the recent renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act for another decade. And this bipartisan action by Congress was an impressive example of the way the United States is prepared to assist in the development and growth in Africa. I cannot speak too highly of those Congress women and men who were so active and for so many years in support of this cause. I believe I can see a number of you here today. May I offer my very sincere thanks for your determined efforts. You showed a very real example of the understanding that the people of America have for the problems of Africa.

Your effort also provides another clear demonstration of the way we can and do work together, closely and harmoniously, for joint development of our people.

Mr. President, Excellencies, today we are celebrating a longstanding, time-tested, and exceptional relationship. I believe I can speak for us all when I say that this closeness could now be expressed at a new level of contact and development. The United States, of course, continues to play major role in global efforts for peace and development.

There are the central issues for us as well, and I believe I can say that we have similar views on major regional and global issues. We have been cooperating closely at the United Nations, in the African Union, and in our regional organization, IGAD. We greatly appreciate this support we have received and continue to receive from the United States for the resolution of conflict and peace-building and stability in our region. We are most grateful for your steadfast support to our collective efforts in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

Mr. President, with all this in mind, we in Ethiopia would like to infuse a new level of commitment into our relationship with the United States. We have built a firm relationship on the basis of mutual trust and respect, and now we'd like to extend this and raise our

links to a new level, to explore further opportunities for development and build a wider network of activity that can strengthen our bilateral relationship. It is something from which I believe we can both benefit.

Mr. President, you have here a very trusted friend, a country and people that highly appreciate what the United States stands for. Now, in the spirit of the friendship, I would therefore like to propose a toast to the bright future that awaits the people of our two countries and to the good health and happiness of Your Excellency.

Distinguished guests, may I ask you to stand and join me in a toast to the President of the United States of America and to all the people of the great nation. Long live Ethiopia-U.S friendship. Cheers.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Hailemariam offered a toast.*]

President Obama. Thank you so much. Good evening, everybody. I would greet you in all the languages of Ethiopia, but I'm told that there are more than 80. [*Laughter*] So that would keep us here all night. [*Laughter*] So let me just say *indemin walachu*.

Prime Minister Hailemariam and distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: It is a great honor for me to be here tonight as the first sitting United States President to visit Ethiopia. And I want to thank the great people of Ethiopia, including Teddy Mak—he's the one who sang that catchy song upon my welcome. I want to thank all of you for the wonderful reception we've received.

You know Ethiopians are an ancient people in an ancient land. We honor Ethiopia as the birthplace of humankind. In fact, I just met Lucy, our oldest ancestor. [*Laughter*] As your great poet laureate wrote: "Here is the land where the first harmony in the rainbow was born. . . . Here is the root of the Genesis of Life; the human family was first planted here."

When you see our ancestor, 3.5 million years old, we are reminded that Ethiopians, Americans, all the people of the world are part of the same human family, the same chain. And as one of the professors who was describing the

artifacts correctly pointed out, so much of the hardship and conflict and sadness and violence that occurs around the world is because we forget that fact. We look at superficial differences as opposed to seeing the fundamental connection that we all share.

And for more than a century, our two nations have enjoyed a harmony that enriched us both. We've worked together to lift up the fortunes of those most in need. Tonight we also remember former Prime Minister Meles and his dedication to reducing poverty. Together, we've sheltered and cared for refugees fleeing conflict. We've sought to secure our shared future against those who would threaten us.

Of course, of the many contributions Ethiopia has made to the world over the centuries, I'm certain that Americans want to thank you for one in particular, discovering something that sustains people around the world, day and night, and many people in the White House, and that is coffee. [Laughter] Thank you, Ethiopia. We are large consumers of coffee in the White House. [Laughter]

And Ethiopia has ignited the imagination of Americans for generations. Before African Americans won their civil rights, many of them were inspired by this country—a nation that never suffered the indignities of colonialism, people who defended their freedom and their right in self-determination. You already mentioned, Mr. Prime Minister, Colonel John Robinson, an American who was one of the fathers of the Tuskegee Airmen, he was nicknamed the Brown Condor, who then came to Ethiopia and trained Ethiopian pilots to tame their heavens and, as you indicated, helped to set up the Ethiopian Air Force. You sparked the passion of American poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes, who saw in Ethiopia a dignity to be celebrated and emulated.

Ethiopia kindled a commitment to service for generations of young Americans who volunteered for the Peace Corps and who have for

decades worked alongside the people of this proud land. For my part, I was impressed by the courage of the Ethiopian journalist that I welcomed to the White House earlier this year, moved by her determination to champion a robust free press, and I very much appreciated the comments you made at the press conference today about the evolution that's taking place to deepen democracy here.

So the deep connections between our peoples is built on the values that we share. We saw that so clearly 2 years ago when the Boston Marathon suffered that horrendous terrorist bombing. And in a gesture of great solidarity and compassion, the runner who won the race, an Ethiopian, returned his medal to honor the victims of the attack. And at this year's Marathon, Americans cheered all the harder when he once again crossed the finish line first with an even faster time. And that, I think, is the hallmark of the American and Ethiopian bond.

We don't give in or give up when things get hard, but we come back better and we come back stronger. So there's no doubt that Ethiopians and Americans are sprung from the same root of life—we have evidence of that. Tonight I'd like to offer a toast: To another century of friendship, to our one human family, and to a bright future for the land where the first harmony of the rainbow was born. *Letenachin*. For you Americans, that means "to our health" or "cheers." [Laughter]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:02 p.m. at the National Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Zeresenay "Zeray" Alemseged, professor of anthropology, California Academy of Sciences; Simegnish "Lily" Mengesha, Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, National Endowment for Democracy; and marathon runner Lelisa Desisa. Prime Minister Hailemariam referred to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa.