

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya in Nairobi, Kenya  
July 25, 2015

*President Kenyatta.* Thank you very much, Amina. And I appreciate your sentiments. President Barack Obama, President Mwai Kibaki, our distinguished visitors, distinguished guests: Let me begin once again, as I have said severally since the start of this visit, on behalf of the people of the Republic of Kenya, that we are once again delighted to welcome you to this country and to this city. And I know and strongly believe that you have felt the warmth of our people and, indeed, especially you, President Obama, the tremendous joy at your presence here with us in Nairobi and in Kenya. Welcome and welcome again.

Mr. President, this is not your first trip to Kenya. And indeed, we have heard severally, Amina has just mentioned, and you yourself have told us that you have been here. But yesterday you returned riding on the wings of history as a President of historic consequence for America, for Africa, and most importantly, for Kenya.

As a world leader who has grappled with great challenges of this age and as a builder of bridges, and to you once again, we say, *karibu na sana Kenya*.

The people of Kenya and the United States share such an abiding love of freedom that we have made grim sacrifices to secure it for our children. We then chose to weave our diverse cultures into a national tapestry of harmonious coexistence. Our paths have not been easy. We have not realized these values in full measure, as indeed we have discussed. But our record has been one of steady progress.

Indeed, Kenya has been inspired by the immense accomplishments of the United States in its 239 years of independence. We, as a country, are much younger. It has been a mere half century since the dawn of our republic. Yet, in that time, we've had the foundation built for an enduring democracy. On our journey, we have been strengthened by the support of our friends, and few of them have been closer than the United States.

In 1959, one of our own national heroes, Tom Mboya, shared a stage with Martin Luther King, Jr., and he said that Africans and the Americans of the civil rights movement were united in a common search for political freedom. He would then join hands with Senator John F. Kennedy, other American philanthropists and activists, to bring hundreds of young Kenyans to American universities. He hoped to prepare a group of educated and committed Kenyans who would complete the transition from colonial domination to self-government.

His hopes were more than fulfilled. The Nobel Laureate, the late environmentalist, Professor Wangari Maathai, was one of those who traveled. Another was Barack Obama Senior, your father, who had the same audacious hope that you have and spoke powerfully about it: to make something of his immense promise and to bring development and freedom to his people.

To this day, Kenyans still travel to the United States in search of education. Some of those assembled here went to American colleges, and Kenyans now form the second largest group of students from Africa in the United States. Indeed, Mr. President, you and I have constituents in common. [*Laughter*] The largest part of our diaspora, many holding dual citizenships, and who are now entitled to vote in Kenya as well—[*laughter*]—reside in America.

America has shown great generosity in aiding our development efforts and has supported our democratic aspirations. Our relationship has been unbroken for half a century. And, Mr. President, I believe that you and I can deepen this relationship. And together, we can make this region safe again. We can secure democracy, and we can bring our entrepreneurs and investors together for our common prosperity.

I, indeed, look forward to continuing our conversation in the coming weeks and months. And indeed, before I conclude, I must say that this is destiny in many ways. Fifty-some years ago, I don't think anybody would ever have

realized what we share here today. As those who left Kenyan shores, aided and supported by the American brothers and sisters who shared the very ideals that this country then was fighting for and who welcomed our own men and women at the time, I don't think many ever realized that one day a product of that initiative to support our freedom struggle would one day return and be an engine to propel and to transform the African Continent.

This shows the deep partnership that exists between our two countries. This shows that the values we state today, that we share, are not new. These are values that both our nations hold dear. And the truth is, these are values that many of us in our country, Kenya, have chosen to forget. Indeed, it is my wish that today, as we welcome the President of the United States, whose father one day left our shores, and who today returns as President of one of the greatest nations in this world, that we too may learn that greatness is also amongst us if we could just come together, forget our narrow differences, and look towards the future with hope and build on the potential, especially of our young people.

And as I was telling the President earlier, and it still remains my strong belief, as many have said, you know, President Obama has not done enough for Africa—I tend to disagree with that statement. Because “enough” is not about how much money you put on the table. That's not the issue. Africa no longer wants to hold out its hand, begging bowl in place, how much are you going to put.

What President Barack Obama has given back to us is a belief and a hope that, empowered, we can do and achieve for ourselves. He has given us the tools and the belief that it is possible, through our own initiative and hard work, that we can take control of our own destiny, and that we can lead change not just on our continent, but in the world.

I don't think there could be a bigger gift. And indeed, as I say that we shall sadly see you depart tomorrow, we wish you safe travels. We look forward to having you back at some stage in the near future. [Laughter] And please, on behalf of the people of this republic, may you

convey our warmest regards to your wife Michelle, to Malia and Sasha, and to say that Kenyans are also looking forward to welcoming them to our shores sometime in the very near future.

And with those very few and brief remarks—[laughter]—indeed, it is now my pleasure and my honor to ask you all to be up standing and to raise a toast to the President of the United States of America, to the friendship and partnership between our two countries and peoples, now and always.

To the President.

[At this point, President Kenyatta offered a toast.]

President Obama. Thank you so much. *Habari ya jioni*. [Laughter] President Kenyatta, the lovely Madame First Lady, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: I want to once again just express my deepest gratitude to you and the Kenyan people for the incredible hospitality you have shown to me and my delegation, including the Members of Congress who are here today and are doing outstanding work. In my visits here as a younger man, I could have never imagined the outpouring of friendship that I feel today. And so I feel, like my given African name, to be truly blessed.

The presence of the Members of Congress who are here today, I think it describes and expresses the deep support for a strong partnership with Africa and with Kenya. We were able to get the AGOA bill passed. And those of you who know American politics, there aren't too many things where Republicans and Democrats agree these days. [Laughter] But expanding trade and investment and deepening our relationship with Africa is something that garnered bipartisan support. And it's an indication of how the American people feel.

It's a—part of what makes this a special evening for me is the presence of my family members who are here. My grandmother, Mama Sarah, who told me I had to come back to Kenya. And when she says you should do something, generally, you have to do it. [Laughter] I've told this story before—the first time that I visited Kogelo, we—Auma and I and my brothers were there. She—Mama Sarah speaks Swa-

hili and Luo, and I speak neither—[laughter]—and so Auma was serving as a translator. And I think about a half a day had passed before suddenly, she turns to Auma and says something. And Auma starts laughing, and I say, what did she say? She says, he goes to Harvard; if he's so smart, how come he can't talk to his grandmother? [Laughter] Which was a good point.

My siblings are here, aunts, uncles. And so tonight I welcome all of them to a somewhat unusual Obama family reunion. I suspect that some of my critics back home are suggesting that I'm back here to look for my birth certificate. [Laughter] That is not the case. [Laughter]

But what is true is, is that obviously there are emotions to a visit like this. Memories come rushing back. When I was in college, and my father was here, I wrote him a letter telling him of my hope to visit. And he wrote me back, and he said, "Dear Son, even if it is only for a few days, the important thing is that you know your people." Now, he died in an accident before I was able to make that trip. But in fact, when I came, I did get to know them, the people of Kenya. And although, once again, I'm here only for a few days, I remain grateful for that relationship.

I've seen the resolve and the determination to pull together, under a new Constitution, as one people. I've seen your dynamism, as you've built the largest economy in East Africa. And I've seen the resilience, as in the recent re-opening of the Westgate Mall, which shows that the spirit of the Kenyan people cannot be broken.

And I've seen it in the friendship between our peoples, particularly our young people. As many of you know, our Mandela Fellows program invites promising African youth to the United States so they can develop skills and training, and forge relationships as future leaders here in Africa. And we learn from them, as well. And it's one of the most important ways that we invest in Africa's future. It's something I'm very passionate about personally.

In fact, at this very moment, as part of this program, there are 40 young Kenyans across the United States living and working and learn-

ing, but also sharing Kenyan culture with their American hosts. Americans are learning Swahili. They're eating chapatti—[laughter]—and they're listening to Kenyan music. In California, they've been dancing to "Sura Yako."

So here tonight, and across the United States, Kenyans and Americans are coming together. We're understanding each other better. We're finding new ways to partner. And I believe that if we can build on what we've accomplished on this visit, then we can achieve even more in the years to come: for our people, for our beautiful lands, for our freedom, for peace.

I was reflecting on what President Kenyatta said about the past and history. And our fathers were people who lived at the same time and went through independence of this country at the same time, took different paths obviously—my father was significantly younger—and it's true that it would have been hard for them to imagine how their sons might be sitting here today. [Laughter]

But there's an expression that says we plant a tree not because we will enjoy its shade, but because our children and grandchildren will.

And so I'd like to propose a toast not only to this generation of Kenyans and Africans, not only to future generations of Kenyans and Africans and Americans, but also to our forefathers and our foremothers who laid the groundwork, who planted the seed so that we could enjoy a little bit of shade.

To the people of Kenya and to the people of the United States of America, *munga abariki Kenya*.

[President Obama offered a toast.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:21 p.m. at the State House. In his remarks, he referred to Margaret Gakuo Kenyatta, wife of President Kenyatta. He also referred to his grandmother Sarah Onyango Obama and sister Auma. President Kenyatta referred to Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Trade Amina Chawahir Mohamed and former President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya. A portion of President Kenyatta's remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.