

Remarks Following a Meeting With African Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

March 28, 2013

The President. Well, it is a great pleasure to welcome four leaders from Africa, all of whom are doing extraordinary work: President Sall from Senegal, President Banda from Malawi, President Koroma from Sierra Leone, and Prime Minister Neves from Cape Verde.

The reason that I'm meeting with these four is, they exemplify the progress that we're seeing in Africa. All of them have had to deal with some extraordinary challenges. Sierra Leone, just 10 years ago, was in the midst of as brutal a civil war as we've ever seen. And yet now we've seen consecutive fair and free elections. And under President Koroma's leadership, we've seen not only good governance, but also significant economic growth.

When you talk about Malawi, there was a constitutional crisis just last year. And yet President Banda has not only been able to be in office and make sure that constitutional order was restored, but has also made significant progress on behalf of her people. And her personal story of overcoming a history of abuse and leading women throughout her country, I think, indicates the kinds of progress that can be made when you've got strong leadership.

The same is true for His Excellency President Sall. There were some bumps in the road in terms of transition from the previous President, and yet the Senegalese rose up at a grassroots level and sustained their democracy.

And Cape Verde is a real success story. We were hearing from Prime Minister Neves about the fact that just in a few decades, they've moved from a per capita income of maybe \$200 a year to now \$4,000 a year and are now moving into the middle of the pack in terms of development levels because of good governance and management.

So what our discussion has focused on is, number one, how do we continue to build on strong democracies, how do we continue to build on transparency and accountability. Because what we've learned over the last several decades is that when you've got good governance—when you have democracies that work, sound management of public funds, transparency and accountability to the citizens that put leaders in place—it turns out that that is not only good for the state and the functioning of government, it's also good for economic development, because it gives people confidence, it attracts business, it facilitates trade and commerce.

And all of these leaders have good stories to tell on that. They recognize that there's still more work to be done, and so I'm very pleased that all of them are looking to move forward on the Open Government Partnership that we helped to organize through the United Nations several years ago and that we are now seeing countries from all across the world sign up for, setting up international norms for accountability and transparency that can lead to good governance.

We also talked about the economic situation. And all of us recognize that, although Africa has actually been growing faster than almost every other region of the world, it started from a low baseline, and it still has a lot of work to do. And that means building human capacity and improving education and job skills for rapidly growing and young populations. It means improving access to energy and transportation sectors. And so we discussed how the United States can continue to partner effectively with each of these countries.

And then, we finally talked about young people generally and how we can mobilize the next generation of African leadership. And individuals like President Koroma have taken great interest in finding additional ways that we can recruit and engage young people not only to get involved in public service, but also to get involved in entrepreneurship that helps build these countries.

And so my main message to each of these leaders is that the United States is going to be a strong partner, not based on the old model in which we are a donor and they are simply a recipient, but a new model that's based on partnership and recognizing that no continent has greater potential or greater upside than the continent of Africa if they in fact have the kind of strong leadership that these four individuals represent.

And we intend to continue to engage with them through a range of programs—through the Millennium Challenge, through the USAID, through the PEPFAR programs—but we're also looking for new models that can potentially improve our bilateral relations even more.

The last point I'd make: We all discussed some of the regional challenges involved. Obviously, economic development, prosperity doesn't happen if you have constant conflict. And nobody knows that more than these individuals. Some, like President Koroma, has seen that firsthand.

Now many of the threats are transnational. You've seen terrorism infiltrate into the region. We've seen drug cartels that are using West Africa in particular as a transit point. All of this undermines some of the progress that's been made, and so the United States will continue to cooperate with each of these countries to try to find smart solutions so that they can build additional capacity and make sure that these cancers don't grow in their region. And the United States intends to be a strong partner for that.

So I just want to say to each of them, thank you for your extraordinary work. You should know that you have a great friend in the United States, in the people of the United States, and in the President of the United States, because we believe that if you're successful, that ultimately will help us grow our economies and contribute to a more peaceful world as well. So thank you very much.

Thank you, guys.

Former South African President Nelson R. Mandela's Health

Q. Mandela? You can be brief.

The President. Well, obviously, we're all deeply concerned with Nelson Mandela's health. He's a hero, I think, to all of us. I'm sure that I speak for the other leaders here. And we will be keeping him in our thoughts and prayers and his entire family. He is as strong physically as he's been in character and in leadership over so many decades, and hopefully, he will come out of this latest challenge.

But we all recognize that he has given everything to his people, the people of South Africa, to the people of the continent, and he's ended up being an inspiration to all of us. When you think of a single individual that embodies the kind of leadership qualities that I think we all aspire to, the first name that comes up is Nelson Mandela, and so we wish him all the very best.

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal.

Categories: : Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Cape Verde, Prime Minister Neves; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Malawi, President Banda; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Senegal, President Sall; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Sierra Leone, President Koroma.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Banda, Joyce; Koroma, Ernst Bai; Mandela, Nelson R.; Neves, Jose Maria Pereira; Neves, Jose Maria Pereira ; Sall, Macky; Wade, Abdoulaye.

Subjects: Africa : Democracy efforts; Africa : Economic growth and development; Africa : Terrorism; Africa : West Africa, drug trafficking and transit; Cape Verde : Economic growth and development; Cape Verde : President; Cape Verde : Prime Minister; Cape Verde : Relations with U.S.; Development, U.S. Agency for International; Foreign Policy, U.S. : Open government and transparency, promotion efforts; HIV/AIDS : Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, President's; Malawi : Democracy efforts; Malawi : President; Malawi : Relations with U.S.; Open Government Partnership; Senegal : Democracy efforts; Senegal : President; Senegal : Relations with U.S.; Sierra Leone : Democracy efforts; Sierra Leone : President; Sierra Leone : Relations with U.S.; South Africa : Former President; United Nations : Millennium Development Goals.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300193.