

Testimony of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield

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Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing on the future of United States policy toward Africa. Allow me to thank you for your commitment and service to Africa and for your support during my tenure as Assistant Secretary for Africa from 2013-2017. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the dreadful situation in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe as a result of Cyclone Idai.

Indeed, 2019 is a critical time for Africa policy. There have been a series of long-term trends and recent developments which have put the continent at the forefront like never before. When looking at today's global challenges, they all have an impact on and are impacted by developments in Africa: migration and refugees, climate change, growing youth

populations, insecurity, and democratic transitions. African countries hold great promise but there are certainly perils that can undermine Africa's potential if many factors are not handled correctly. That is why it is crucial that there be sustained U.S. engagement on the continent.

Historically Positive Bi-partisan U.S. Policy

Over the years, the U.S. has shown great bipartisan leadership on African issues. The bipartisan focus of our government led to the passing of programs like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the President's Malaria Initiative, which have been crucial in the fight against these two pandemics in Africa. Likewise, the continued renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act has played a major role to further trade and investment with our African counterparts. In an even more exciting way, the Young African Leadership Initiative has seen the U.S. play host to some of Africa's youngest and brightest lights, strengthening our connections to the continent's future leaders and improving U.S. standings yet again in Africa. Power Africa brought to the forefront Africa's need for electricity to energize Africa's lagging economic growth.

The Millennium Challenge Account continues to have a major impact on Africa's infrastructure having invested in over 15 years more than \$8.3 billion dollars in 22 countries.

All of these efforts were laced with our value system at the core. Our belief in democracy, good governance, human rights, and prosperity made the U.S. a major player on the continent of Africa.

Current U.S. Strategy

The positive relevance of U.S. engagement with Africa will continue with the current administration's BUILD Act and PROSPER Africa initiative. While I will leave the more in-depth look at our bilateral economic relationship with the continent, to my fellow panelist Dr. Brahim Coulibaly these initiatives are positive as the U.S. seeks to further strengthen trade ties with a still burgeoning African market full of opportunities. According to the World Bank, Africa is forecast to grow at 3.4 percent this year, with Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Côte d'Ivoire expected to lead the continent with growth rates over 7 percent. Political and economic reforms in countries such as Angola are also proving key

to development, as the same World Bank forecast predicts an incredible turnaround from -1.8 percent growth in 2018 to 2.9 percent in 2019. African states are also ever so closer to ratify the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, with only one country left to ratify getting to the 22 needed to put the agreement in force with the purpose of boosting intra-Africa trade. Such a boost is also beneficial to our industries as stronger African markets mean more possibilities for business as a growing consumer class takes root on the continent. Overall, the continent continues to move forward by improving its infrastructure, increasing the use of digital technology, upgrading its business and investment climate, and diversifying its economies – all of which present considerable opportunities for our private sector and will contribute to more progress in the future. We simply cannot afford to let the opportunity to work with our African partners slip away.

The current administration correctly identifies that the “*stability, prosperity, independence, and security on the African continent are in the national security interest of the United States.*” While I am encouraged

by this clear recognition, I would steer the policy away from framing Africa as merely a battleground for great power competition against China and Russia. I would argue that it is in our interest to view engagement with the continent as a key and important element in and of itself. Our interest in Africa should be judged on its own intrinsic value and not as a zero-sum race against other powers. We should be focused on building a strong partnership with Africa which is based on shared values of peace, prosperity, sustained economic growth and development, and a firm commitment to good governance, gender equity and the rule of law.

The United States brings many resources to the table that other countries do not, whether within government, in our business community, and our non-profit organizations. Additionally, the United States hosts a large and vibrant African diaspora community, who have been great contributors to America both economically and socially. The African diaspora in the U.S. can also be a key plank of support and a force multiplier for U.S. values on the continent. As we commemorates the 400-year anniversary since

Africans arrived to this land in bondage, we must remember the deep connection between U.S. and Africa.

We, as a nation, are linked to the continent in ways that provide great strength, both domestically and in foreign policy. What the United States does well cannot be matched by competitors. Our values call for ordinary Africans to thrive along with the elites, our industries have more expertise to share with African states, and our genuine wish for partnership, and not subservience, set us apart. There are more opportunities on the continent for collaboration than there are for competition. The United States should be taking a more positive and pro-active approach to Africa, emphasizing the potential of the continent rather than its risks. With that in mind, there are four key trends that I could identify as pivotal to the future of our policy toward the continent.

Four Key Trends

Youth Bulge

As many of you know, Africa is facing an unprecedented demographic evolution. Estimates are that by 2050, the population of the African

continent will have doubled from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion, representing a quarter of the world's population. In 2050, Africa will have 362 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. More to the point, today half of that population is under the age of 19. The huge proportion of youth in African populations can either be Africa's golden ticket or its greatest challenges. To punch in that ticket, I believe there is a need to create opportunities for Africa's youth. That means creating jobs. It also means strengthening education systems. It means mentoring and providing opportunity, especially expanding opportunities for girls and women.

It is vital that the United States work to help African countries to use this growth to foster prosperity. If there is not adequate education or jobs to meet demand, then the youth bulge could see an increase in scale in unsafe migration, insecurity, and radicalization.

Security and Terrorism

Maybe one of the most critical area of collaboration with African states involves security. It is undeniable that the continent has continued to face

serious challenges in that regard, as recently evident by the horrific terrorist attack in Kenya in January this year. However, it is equally unmistakable that Africans are progressively stepping up to the plate and taking seriously their own security needs. The pulling together of the G5 Sahel and the AU's offer to take on a higher share of fiscal responsibility in regional peacekeeping efforts are both positive signs. In the near term, continued U.S. engagement with African stakeholders to tackle these threats is necessary. The U.S. should not only focus on security assistance, but recognize the importance of helping Africa to deal with many of its pressing economic and social challenges as a way to combat and reduce the insecurity and instability that feeds conflict in Africa. The proposed reduction of 10% of American troops deployed on the continent sends the wrong message to our partners. Moreover, the presence of our troops encourages a professional demeanor from security forces with whom they work hand in hand in other African countries. It is also important to devote increased resources to diplomatic engagement, economic development and to reinvest in democracy promotion to highlight

universal values that we share with our African counterparts. Military solutions alone will not stop insecurity and conflict in Africa.

Democracy and Democratic Transition

The rising number of youths also has an effect on what should be another American priority: consolidating democracy across the continent. America is about values. We must connect with populations on the continent to continue sharing the values we have in common with African populations. The United States must continue to promote democracy programs across the continent and hold leaders accountable to their increasingly youthful populations. While today, 70 percent of Africa's population is under 30, only 14 percent of the region's politicians are under 40. Democratic leaders make not only for better allies, but also are more likely to see their youth as an opportunity for their country, not a threat to be countered. Too many African countries still struggle with democratic transitions. Leaders need to focus on plans for a peaceful, political handover and stable elections from the minute they come to power. In the long term, democracy contributes to better governance,

human development, security, and economic growth. The vast majority of Africans want to live in a democracy, but the proportion who believe they actually do falls almost every year.

Climate Change

As mentioned earlier, the fallout of cyclone Idai in southern Africa has shown the importance of engaging African policymakers on climate change and adopting environmentally conscious policies. As forests shrink and deserts grow, populations are ever more vulnerable in the face of increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. In response to Idai, the U.S. offer of assistance to the affected countries in what the UN has categorized as “*one of the worst weather-related disasters ever to hit the southern hemisphere*” is an important statement. Renewed international commitment to elements of the Paris Climate Change Agreement would benefit Africa’s efforts to address some of the environmental challenges it now faces.

While I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to engage on the entire continent, there are some that I believe decision makers should watch.

Countries to Watch

Nigeria

The Nigerian elections showed that states that are looking to consolidate democracy still have a long way to go. While there is widespread consensus that these elections fell short of the high standards set in 2015, the Nigerian people and its leadership still show a strong commitment to democracy. The importance of the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa, and its number one economy, is self-evident. Its potential is boundless, with an established human capital, growing consumer class, and burgeoning private sector. Yet the country still struggles with insecurity, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure, among other things. As President Buhari embarks on his second and final term, the U.S. need to remain supportive of reforms that will help entrench democratic values.

South Africa

South Africa will hold elections in May of this year. These elections will hopefully put the country back on a positive economic path after almost a decade of economic decline. South Africans hope that these polls will help reestablish democratic values, which they fought so hard to achieve during the apartheid regime, as a priority for the country. As the next administration in South Africa deals with institutional corruption and the tricky waters of land redistribution, the U.S. needs to support the country's transition to let the South African people know we are standing side by side with them.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is an example of the profound change that African countries can go through quickly with principled leaders at the helm. The U.S. should be very pleased with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's decisions to implement reforms that we had been pushing for decades, including economic liberalization, opening up political space, and making peace within the region. The United States should ramp up its engagement with the government of Ethiopia to ensure these reforms continue unhindered

and that they become institutionalized within Ethiopia. The Horn of Africa is an increasingly important region geopolitically and the United States should not squander the opportunity to build closer relations with the vital player that is Ethiopia.

South Sudan

In South Sudan, the U.S. has fallen behind on diplomatic leadership and abdicated responsibility for a state which we helped birth. While Horn of Africa member states in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have tried to fill the role, the level of influence that the U.S. brings will be the kind of strong leadership needed to ensure the terms of the recent ceasefires and treaties are followed. As recommended by the International Crisis Group, it is critical for third-party mediation to help work with both sides to solve the intractable issues of reconciling armed groups and drawing internal boundaries if preparations to form a unity government in May 2019 are to succeed. The United States should designate a special envoy to provide U.S. leadership on this issue, an individual who can work with leaders in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and

Sudan to break the cycle of continued conflict in South Sudan, providing peace for the long-suffering people of South Sudan.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the first peaceful transition of power in the country's history remains fragile. This is an important period for Africa's sleeping giant. It remains unclear how much this transition will turn the pages on the DRC's past and show real change. The DRC still faces daunting challenges that must be addressed. I am especially concerned about lingering high levels of corruption, armed conflicts involving numerous militias in the east, and the presence of Ebola in that region of the country as well, which international health workers have had great difficulty to address due to the persistent insecurity. I welcomed the appointment of Dr. Peter Pham as Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa in November of 2018 and it is in U.S. interests to engage Congolese leadership. Likewise, we should strengthen our ties to civil society groups working to support meaningful reforms that will help the country overcome its substantial challenges to take its rightful place in the

upper echelon of African countries. Through these engagements, the U.S. should work hand in hand with the Congolese people to make progressive change for the country and the region.

Zimbabwe

There were high expectations in 2018 when President Mnangagwa was elected President. However, the behavior of the government in cracking down on dissent following the elections, and protests earlier this year, remains a grave concern. Though there has been increased engagement by Zimbabwean leadership with multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, much progress remains for Zimbabwe to prove it is embarking on a new path. There must be continued U.S. engagement with the government of Zimbabwe to show that the transition from the long-time Mugabe regime, recent disputed elections, and protests will ultimately give way to a more democratic and transparent process of governing that will justify removal of sanctions and increased investments.

Ghana

I would like to speak about Ghana because it is a valuable partner to the United States and in many ways an example of what U.S.-Africa relations are transitioning towards. Ghana is a model for African nations for its long history of resilient democratic institutions and strong rule of law. The new focus of Ghana to be a partner for “trade, not aid” should be welcomed by the United States. U.S. relations with Ghana are an emblem of what the U.S. should hope to have in the future with many African states. As the African middle class continues to grow, African leaders are more interested in economic partnerships rather than subsidiary relationships. To the many states that are developing economically and politically, Ghana shows that democracy and rule of law are vital to long-term prosperity for all nations.

Three Concerning Mentions

Others where there have also been concerning developments and are worthy of more scrutiny on our parts include Tanzania, where there has been a surge in anti-democratic policies, Sudan, which is in the midst of growing unrest and uncertainty, and Cameroon, a huge recipient of U.S.

security assistance and partner against Boko Haram where the conflict between the government and separatists is growing increasingly violent.

Diplomacy

To achieve our goals in Africa and around the globe, we must have sustained and strong diplomatic efforts. The recent visits of Deputy Secretary Sullivan to South Africa and Angola and Assistant Secretary Tibor Nagy to Cameroon, DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda are welcome and highlight the type of direct engagement that is needed. However, too many ambassadorships in Africa are still vacant. Postings in South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Chad, Egypt, Libya and Morocco, as well as others are yet to be filled. In fact, in order to have successful engagement with the African continent, we need to invest in more diplomatic presence on the ground, not less. Many of our embassies are still short-staffed and under resourced. Over the past five years, America's spending on core diplomacy has fallen by a third. A third! We should not scale back, but rather push on! Push on to confirm our friendship to the African people, push on to maintain critical ties with

communities who share an affinity for us, push on to support private sector investment and to showcase that American global leadership is truly alive and well.

Conclusion

Ultimately, how Africans define their future is up to Africans themselves, but we must partner with them to achieve our mutual goals.

It is absolutely in the interests of the United States to see the continent of Africa grow and thrive.