

**H.E. Hilda Suka-Mafudze
Ambassador
African Union (AU) Mission to the United States**

**REMARKS AT THE 8TH ANNUAL AGOA CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK
SPRING CONFERENCE**

Mr. Fred O. Oladeinde, Chairman of the AGOA Civil Society Network

Ms. Jennifer Cook, Director of the Institute for African Studies

Your Excellencies, Distinguished participants from Civil Society, private Sector and Academia, Members of the Diaspora , Students

All protocol respected.

Allow me to extend to you Fred and through you the Network my sincere gratitude and high appreciation for the kind invitation extended to me to participate in today's Forum placed under a timely and important theme of " Extending AGOA to 2035: Using Trade to Strengthen US-Africa Strategic Alliance.

My sincere thanks go to the School of International Affairs at the George Washington University for the excellent work you have been doing to provide more visibility to African issues and I thank you for that.

The African Union Mission highly values the collaboration with the U.S and African Civil Society as well as other key stakeholders in underscoring the sense of urgency that our countries feel about AGOA's renewal in Congress, AGOA preferential program is set to expire by September 2025.

As you all know, a strong economic partnership between Africa and the US is a shared strategic interest. We want our trade and investment relationship to reflect the economic standing of the U.S as the world's leading economy and major source of FDI and the rising profile of Africa as the next frontier of global economic growth, a hopeful continent with some of the highest rates of return on investment. The extension of AGOA for 10 years can be instrumental in this regard.

However, the critical question that we need to address as is how to work together by ensuring a timely reauthorization of AGOA, on the one hand, and to how we improve AGOA, make it more effective so as it achieves its full potential. Striking such a delicate balance between the urgency of the renewal and the enhancement of AGOA without delaying it is a critical question that needs to be addressed..

AGOA remains the cornerstone of the U.S.-Africa trade relationship, and it has indeed ensured that the close commercial ties of Africa and

the U.S. have deepened in the face of ever-increasing global competition for economic engagement.

The preferences that it provides have fostered a mutually beneficial partnership that has allowed for job creation in both the U.S. and Africa, the enhancement of trade and business environments, and the reinforcement of stability and security in a region that is now considered one of the most dynamic and fastest growing in the world.

AGOA is also directly contributing in addressing one of the biggest challenges faced by the continent, namely the employment of youth and women. With the youngest population in the world and in a global landscape where youth unemployment could be a vector for instability and insecurity, AGOA presents a valuable and effective instrument for this key constituency in African economies by creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Distinguished participants:

We all agree that the adoption of AGOA in 2000 ushered in a fundamental change in U.S. policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa and a new dynamic in U.S-Africa relations.

23 years since the enactment of AGOA, and two years before its expiration in 2025 after an extension of 10 years under President

Obama in 2015, it is of great importance to reflect on what improvements need to be made to make AGOA better and what can be done going forward to ensure further enhancement of U.S-Africa trade and investment relations and a more effective utilization of AGOA to serve better the interests of all parties.

Another challenge is how AGOA develops its full potential as an engine of intra-regional integration. and how we use AGOA as an instrument for Africa to leapfrog in terms of skills development, technological advancement and job creation. AGOA is an important vehicle through which the U.S. could contribute to the promotion of intra-African trade and increase Africa's global competitiveness.

No one can deny that AGOA eligible countries have an implementation challenge of the Legislation because of the lack of dedicated predictable and sustained technical assistance and appropriate resources to assist in developing and implementing utilization strategies and take advantage of the benefits available under this program.

Hence , the importance of our Forum Today. Now is the time to engage on the best approaches as key stakeholders to ensure and expeditious renewal of the program.

As you all know, our **Ministers requested the US Administration to extend AGOA, for at least 10 years (2025-2035)**. This request comes with an additional proposal to renew AGOA by September 2023 in order to ensure predictability and legal certainty of Investments between US and Africa.

In that sense, its timely renewal is important to all of, conditionalities should be revised to make AGOA better than it currently is and for the benefit of both US and Africa. We all agree that AGOA presents a significant market opportunity for African countries to **spur industrialization**.

I believe it is important through AGOA Framework to leverage on Africa's Industrialization Agenda by ensuring that comparative advantages and complementarities remain the drivers of Africa's regional and continental integration agenda as well as removal of trade restrictions like SPS measures.

Considering the negative effects from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the geo-political turmoil that have wiped out the economic gains, African **Ministers recommended** that during the extension period, that all African beneficiaries should be retained in line with the consensus for an equitable Graduation Clause.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In 2015, the AU Mission worked closely with the African Diplomatic Corps to push for the renewal of AGOA for an additional 10 years. Stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and key advocates within Congress all helped to ensure that the successful renewal of the legislation was achieved for its longest period ever.

We look forward to working with all of you to ensure the passage of The Passage of the renewal of the legislation in time (September/October 2023) . Such renewal would send a powerful political signal of the strength of U.S. support for deeper trade and economic ties with Africa.

I look forward with great interest to the recommendations of this Forum that would provide valuable insights on how to expedite the process of AGOA renewal and frame it in a compelling manner that would resonate well with all key stakeholders particularly in the U.S Congress where there is a need for a robust and sustained engagement particularly taking in to account the new congressional landscape.

I thank you all for your kind attention