

REMARKS OF
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[MBDA]

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[A Trade, Investment and Cultural Conference and Exhibition
Showcasing Business and Investment Opportunities in Africa]

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GEORGIA WORLD CONGRESS CENTRE

Atlanta, Georgia

“A CHARGE TO KEEP”

**THE GHANIAN AMERICAN
BUSINESS TO BUSINESS
ENTERPISE MISISON**

Greetings to His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene, his Excellencies , President Kufuor, Vice President Aliu Mahama, and my friend the distinguished former Ghanaian Ambassador to the United States and now the esteemed Minister of Trade and Industry, Alan Kyeremateng. On behalf of the President of the United States, George W. Bush, and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Don Evans, it is an honor to represent the United States through the U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) at the Ghana Expo 2004.

In January of 2003, I had the opportunity to express my optimistic about Africa’s future, and in particular the United States of America’s relationship with Africa. Why?, because President Bush and this Administration has clearly established on several fronts that it is committed to Africa. In June of 2002, at the 3rd Biennial Leon H. Sullivan Summit Dinner, President Bush recognized and associated himself with the legacy of Dr. Leon Sullivan and noted that:

“...if we want to live in a world that is free, we must work for a world that is just.The free people of America have a duty to advance the cause of freedom in Africa. American interests and American morality lead in the same direction: We will work in partnership with African nations and leaders for an African continent that lives in liberty and grows in prosperity...”

The President on January 15, 2003, in an address to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Acceleration Act (AGOA II) delegates stated:

“...All of us share a common vision for the future of Africa. We look forward to the day when prosperity for Africa is built through trade and markets. We see a continent at peace, where the people of Africa obtain education and medical care, and live in freedom....”

“...For many years, America and the world looked to the continent of Africa and saw only its problems. That era has passed. In this new century, the world is beginning to see the great potential of Africa and the goodness of its people...”

The President was both eloquent and sincere in his messages at the Sullivan dinner and to the 2003 AGOA conference. I believe him, and more importantly, I trust the President. Trust means everything. Between the periods of May 2001 through January 2003, President Bush met with 25 African Heads of States. In July of 2003, the President met with leaders of the Western African democracies at the Presidential Palace in Dakar, Senegal. A consistent theme through these meetings was the transition from a relationship between the United States and Africa driven by aid, to a new focus on establishing relationships based on trade, commerce, and business enterprise.

Uganda’s President Museveni said it best:

“by itself, aid cannot transform societies. Only trade can foster the sustained economic growth necessary for such transformation.”

Free Trade and its promotion are vital to Africa, and to the United States. I applaud the support of the African nations and their Ambassadors who supported the Administrations Trade Promotion Authority legislation, and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). AGOA has been beneficial to all parties. Free Trade has created jobs, wealth and opportunity on both continents. AGOA is a great start, but only a beginning. There is much more to be accomplished so I ask you to trust the United

States as we engage with Africa in what U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell described as “America’s commitment to make a better a world a great and noble cause”.

If Africa is a continent where promise and progress are important, then Ghana is one of several vital gateways to Africa and is particular its Sub-Saharan regions. As the National Director of the (MBDA), I pledge to work within the U.S. Department of Commerce and among the other Federal departments to provide value-added technical and managerial assistance to develop and enhance entrepreneurship in Africa. MBDA is committed to developing *business-to-business* relationships between the national minority business enterprise (MBE) community and African businesses and leaders. Particular emphasis will be focused on linking African-American businesses with “grass roots” Small Medium Enterprises (SME’s) African entrepreneurs.

I want Africa, and especially Americans of African decent, to have the same relationship that the American Asian and Asian Indian communities have with China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India. I want Africa to benefit from direct and reverse direct investment that many Hispanics have with Mexico, Central and South America and Spain. I want to pursue the establishments of commercial relationships that create “win-win” opportunities for wealth creation and sustained strategic growth.

Tip O’Neil, the former Democratic Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives is famous for his observation that “all politics are local.” Today, I believe we would all agree that *business is global*. This Administration through the MBDA has pursued the business case for minority business enterprise in the global (world-wide) economy. For African Americans and other minorities, participation in the world-wide economy is now a *business imperative*. Unfortunately, the business participate rate for African Americans

lags behind all minority groups. Although Access to Capitol, Education and Technology are the *three keys to entrepreneurial success*, the mounting evidence is that minorities in general and African Americans in particular, do not see themselves in business or as business owners. What excited me about Ghana and West Africa was the entrepreneurial energy of its people. As I drove through Accra, everyone was selling something. The streets were full of individuals engaged in trade, commercial exchange and production. I was equally struck by the number of individuals who had bundles on their head, children on their backs or in their arms and a cell phone in their ear. I went to The Busy Internet Café. I could not believe the lines of people waiting to use the DSL lines. I was impressed with the SME's that were being incubated and the joy and devotion of Ghana's women entrepreneurs to emerge, and the many young people running along side the car trying to make a sale. I saw this same energy in Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Capetown, South Africa, Mauritius and Botswana.

The MBDA wants to tap into this entrepreneurial energy. We want to partner with Ghana, West African and other regions in Sub-Saharan Africa to engage in a series of *Business Enterprise Missions*. The Missions would be specifically designed to identify business enterprises on both sides that have the *capacity* to conduct *business to business relationships*. Looking with admiration at the Asian business model, I believe Africa and minority business enterprises in America can engage in an *intelligent relationship* between business and government that will serve as a catalyst for strategic growth.

THE AMERICAN MISSION. As I began my remarks, the President of the United States deserves all the credit for first bringing together a great Cabinet and Team.

Secondly, he is focused on results. Third, he has reminded America that we cannot sit free for long while others are denied freedom and justice elsewhere. I am fortunate to also work for the U.S. Secretary of Commerce who upon his return from Africa informed me that I was going to Ghana, and more importantly, I needed to see Africa. Secretary Evans and President Bush wanted me to see and understand that there remains an “*American Mission*”. A mission committed to human rights, liberty and good governance. An American mission that need not be arrogant in its power, but rather courageous and wise in the full utilization of America’s resolve to fight for peace. The President often speaks about “*A Charge to Keep*” from the hymn of the same title.

America, with all its alleged faults or mis-assessments in the domestic and international arenas still remains the beacon of hope in a world challenged by poverty, hunger, missed opportunity, war, and yes, terror. Despite the critics of America and the doubters about the emergence of a vibrant Africa, I am more optimistic than ever. I have traveled to Africa. I have met with leaders, students, entrepreneurs, and I have witnessed the entrepreneurial energy in Accra, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Gaborone, Freetown and Dakar.

Economic growth, fostered by empowerment through enterprise is *key* to the success of the U.S. minority business enterprise community and to the people of Ghana. We “Africans” of American descents have a charge to keep. We “*the Americans*” who have endured, and to whom much has been given, much is expected; we too have a *charge to keep*. We of the African Diaspora must never forget that our lost freedom from Africa came at high price. It is fitting that we are here in the South, . . . in Atlanta, to continue this great and noble cause to pursue freedom of life, liberty and happiness.

I thank the Ghana Expo 2004 Committee for the invitation, and the MBDA Atlanta National Enterprise Center under the direction of Robert Henderson for the opportunity to participate in this historic event. On behalf of the President, and the Secretary of Commerce, Thank you.