

**Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield's Remarks**  
**"USG-Africa Policy and Priorities"**  
**Mandela Washington Fellowship Host University Retreat**  
**The Westin Washington, D.C. City Center**  
**Friday, February 5, 2016, 9:00 AM**

**INTRO**

- Thank you so much for having me here. And more importantly, thank you to all of you here today for taking time out of your busy schedules to prepare to host our Mandela Washington Fellows. I promise you that the Fellows you will host will not disappoint!

**IMPORTANCE OF YALI**

- I doubt you will find a bigger proponent of YALI than I am. Every time I travel to Africa, I meet with government representatives, and I meet with the Mandela Washington Fellows. These Fellows are extraordinary, and they are galvanizing their communities and countries. They are the future of their countries!
- Let me quickly share a story about a YALI Fellow named Temitayo (Tammy-ta-yo) Etomi (Ate-o-me) from Nigeria, who attended a business and entrepreneurship institute at Clark Atlanta University in 2014. Tamitayo founded a nonprofit network of entrepreneurs and young professionals who are committed to reducing unemployment in Nigeria by at least 25 percent by improving on the skills capacity of unemployed Nigerians. Upon returning home from the Fellowship, her nonprofit organization has employed and trained more than 100 Nigerians with the aim of creating 1.2 million jobs for Nigerian youth by 2020.
- That's just one of many success stories, and one of the reasons why I am deeply invested in YALI. One of my proudest moments was when I realized that there were two people who all YALI Fellows seemed to know – the President, and Linda.

- By 2050, Africa's population will double to two billion people, and many of them will be under 18. The youth bulge will impact the world – we need to ensure that African youth are invested in their future. That's why YALI is so important for generations to come.
- When I travel to Africa and meet with African presidents, I always end my conversation by talking about YALI. I explain to them that they must meet with their young people, and ask them what they see in their future.
- Everyone sees the benefits YALI has provided. There's great interest from the private sector. I recently had lunch with a group of investors – they were all interested in YALI and asked how they could contribute.
- And of course, I am thrilled that we are expanding the Mandela Washington Fellowship program from 500 participants in both 2014 and 2015 to 1,000 participants this year. You all are the ones enabling us to make that happen by stepping up to host our participants – thank you so much.

## **USG PRIORITIES IN AFRICA**

- YALI is one of the most important ways we advance U.S. government priorities in Africa – I want to touch on some of those priorities today and explain how YALI ties in.
- Strengthening democratic institutions in Africa is our top policy priority. There are 17 presidential elections in Africa this year. We support free, fair, and democratic elections – that is what the African people are demanding. For us, it's not about specific candidates. I explain to Africans that our candidate is democracy - our candidate is the people.
- Strengthening democracy won't happen right away – we have to be patient. We have made progress - we have convinced some countries that elections are important, but others still need convincing. And the next step after that is to convince countries of the importance of **good** elections – elections that are free, fair, and transparent.

- Improving democratic governance is about much more than elections, of course. We need to build up civil society and the rule of law, and fight corruption. This is where the Mandela Washington Fellowship plays a key role – we rely on the Public Management Institutes and the Civic Leadership Institutes to provide important lessons on effective governance and the role of civil society – we need young Africans to understand this!
- Our second policy priority is to spur economic trade, growth, and investment, which we do through a number of initiatives. The President’s Power Africa initiative aims to add 60 million new electricity connections to the continent. Last year, the African Growth and Opportunity Act was reauthorized for an additional ten years. This was huge news - African exports under AGOA have more than quadrupled since the program began. AGOA’s reauthorization sends a signal to investors that now is the time to invest in Africa!
- But with the fall in commodity prices and slowdown in China and Europe, Africa’s economic growth overall is expected to slow in the coming year, which makes our efforts even more important. This is where the Business and Entrepreneurship Institutes come into play – we rely on your institutes to train participants to become active and effective in business and entrepreneurship in Africa.
- Our third policy priority is to advance peace and security, ending conflict and fighting terrorism and other transnational threats. The civil war in South Sudan continues to drag on – it is infuriating. We are working hard to get the two sides to honor the commitment they signed and get us on a path to peace. We are focused on promoting security in Africa – helping our African partners build up national and regional capacity to provide security and respond to threats, and helping countries address the underlying factors that can lead to radicalization.
- Achieving long-term peace and security requires us to create opportunities for the next generation. That is our fourth policy priority, and it is what the Mandela Washington Fellowship is all about. All three tracks of the Fellowship help ensure that youth have a stake in the future of their countries and are less susceptible to being drawn into conflict or terrorism.

- To promote opportunity and development, we focus on two primary target audiences – youth and women. All of your institutes will work with youth, and we have ensured that half of this year’s Fellows will be women. A country cannot be successful if its women are not contributing to growth in all areas. And I emphasize this to African leaders – I tell them that they cannot afford to leave half of their population out of the mix. I would like to ask for your help too in making sure that participants learn the importance of gender equality from your institutes.

### **YOUR ROLE IN TAKING CARE OF THE FELLOWS**

- I’m sure this has already been discussed, but I want to emphasize how important your role is in developing our Mandela Washington Fellows, and I also want you to realize that you are truly getting Africa’s best and brightest. Many of our Fellows come from top universities in Africa. They are already accomplished leaders in their communities and countries, often in very challenging environments.
- The selection process is rigorous. In fact, this year we received over 40,000 applications – our embassies spend a great deal of time identifying the young leaders who are best suited to advance embassy goals. The Fellows themselves are eager to build on the strong skillsets and knowledge they have already gained in Africa – and they will be expecting to get that opportunity at your colleges and universities.
- As President Obama said last year when he addressed the African Union in Ethiopia, “The most urgent task facing Africa today and for decades ahead is to create opportunity for the next generation.” Africa is a continent of anxious, ambitious and enthusiastic youth – who need to be motivated. I am so pleased that you all made the choice to help us in this endeavor, and I look forward to hearing about your great work and the successes of our Fellows! Thank you so much.