

16th Annual Africa Day Business Forum
Welcoming Remarks
Motif Hotel Seattle
November 8, 2014 (as prepared)

Good morning, and welcome – especially to Ambassador Andjaba who represents Namibia in Washington D.C. and to Governor Jackson Mandago from Uasin County in Kenya and his delegation, whom I met with a little earlier this morning.

Even though it is our wet season, the good news is that there are many outstanding indoor attractions to visit in the city of Seattle and beyond. I hope you have time to get out and enjoy the area a bit as part of your visit. Or at least find somewhere to watch our Super Bowl Champion Seattle Seahawks football team beat the New York Giants tomorrow afternoon over at Century Link Field.

Besides the Seahawks we have another world-class team in Seattle, the Seattle Sounders F.C. soccer team. In fact there are two players from Nigeria on the Sounders roster - Obafemi Martins and Onyekachi Apam, and one from Uganda, Micheal Azira.

We are here today of course to learn about business and investment opportunities with the continent of Africa and its many nations. I have never been to Africa myself, and I guess I did not realize until recently how big it truly is.

Someone told me that Africa is bigger than the land masses of the US, China, India, Mexico, Peru, France, Spain, Papua New Guinea, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Norway, Italy, New Zealand, the UK, Nepal, Bangladesh and Greece put together. That is indeed very large, but it also means there is big opportunity in Africa.

Today we are focusing on the promise of Africa, reasons to invest in Africa and the formation of new partnerships. We want to learn more about Africa as an emerging hotbed of opportunity and, most importantly, how we here in the state of Washington can take better advantage of that potential.

Today you will hear from many Washington state companies that are either just starting to do business with nations of Africa or have been there for many years.

In past remarks for this forum I have spoken about EarthWise, which builds large catamaran ferry boats for sailing on Lake Victoria out of Uganda. I have talked about Washington state chocolate confectioners that import cocoa beans from Uganda and make chocolates so fine that they are served at the White House. And I have mentioned the hops Washington growers export to Nigeria to brew beer.

While much of our economic focus in Washington is on nations within Asia due to our close proximity by water, we would be remiss not to explore the great continent of Africa and find new ways to increase our ties there. A little secret that is known by everyone in this room but not so much among the general populace is that in our global economy Africa is really where all of the action is right now.

Our task is to seek opportunities that make sense and delve into those markets with the intent of being there for the long-haul. Report after report tell us that the continent is on the rise with a rapidly expanding GDP and is an attractive place for business and investment. China certainly knows this and is heavily into Africa in a number of ways, especially in natural resources.

Many European nations and companies are actively investing in Africa now as well.

I heard of a Dutch company that is in the bulb business that is now growing bulbs in the fertile ground of Kenya to help keep up with world demand for its product. If the Dutch can do it, perhaps our tulip companies in Washington can take a similar cue if it makes business sense to do so.

In his remarks to the three-day U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington D.C. in August, President Obama provided great encouragement by stating:

“I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world – partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect.”

I think most in this room would agree with the president.

And while his words were said about 3,000 miles away in the other Washington, they apply just about everywhere, and I believe especially here in Washington State. There are organizations here that are certainly doing their part to expand our reach to Africa, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH and World Vision are reaching far into Africa in areas of health care, humanitarian aid, development and by providing micro-loans to individual entrepreneurs who simply need a little help to begin making a big difference for their families and communities.

We are very pleased that our region is already engaged in Africa and a big part of the economy of many nations there. Yet even so we are just beginning to tap into this potential.

One company that is making strides in Africa, is the Vashon Island-based BURN Design Lab and BURN Manufacturing Company, represented here by founder Peter Scott.

They are producing about 6,000 cylindrical charcoal stoves per month in Kenya. Between the company’s factory in Kenya and its operations here they employ nearly 100 people.

This is a very important venture. The stoves are used in urban areas and are more efficient than traditional charcoal burning stoves. These stoves also produce about 65 percent less smoke, meaning cleaner air and a safer environment.

The stoves are not expensive – about \$40 each – and individual homeowners are given the opportunity to purchase them on an easy repayment plan. The company has received financing from the Global Alliance for Clean Cook Stoves, the Washington Global Health Alliance, General Electric and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). BURN sells stoves through an innovative partnership with Seattle-based Micro Energy Credits and Equity Bank – Kenya’s largest bank.

I am told that Equity Bank is so proud to be a part of this stove solution that they happily display models of the BURN stoves in each of its branches. You will hear more about the stove effort this afternoon from Peter Scott, whom I understand has been working in the stove development business for about 20 years now. Thank you for all that you and your partners do for Africa, Mr. Scott.

Redmond-based Microsoft is another company that sees great potential in Africa and is working there.

Fernando de Sousa, General Manager of Microsoft's Africa initiatives, tells us that Microsoft has a 22-year history and 26 offices in Africa and through that time has experienced tremendous business growth across the continent.

According to de Sousa, the company's recent 4Afrika Initiative, launched in February 2013, leverages "the work that Microsoft has done in Africa, taking it forward in terms of thinking about how technology impacts the economic development of the continent."

Microsoft is also one of the private sector partners that joined with the federal government earlier this year in the creation of four Regional Leadership Centers in Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa. Beginning in 2015, these centers will improve the availability and quality of leadership training programs and professional development opportunities for young African leaders.

The centers will provide quality leadership training, support entrepreneurship, provide mentorship and establish networking opportunities for young professionals across both the U.S. and Africa.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide \$38 million for the creation of and programs in the Regional Leadership Centers, with matching funds provided from companies in both America and Africa.

Over at the business department at Washington State University in Pullman we have something sort of similar along these same lines, only on a far smaller scale. As a result of its involvement in Africa, the business school has partnered with The Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology to set up a business plan competition. Graduate students from Tanzania have visited the WSU campus four times in recent years.

Some interesting things have come out of it. For example, one of the African participants used the experience to set up a company that makes and sells nutrition bars for distribution to African children.

Another project was by a woman who wants to help chicken farmers by using mobile phone technology to relay market data of available meat supply with processing facilities.

Of course WSU has partnered with U.S. AID for many years on agricultural projects across Africa. More recently, the Paul G. Allen Center for Global Animal Health at WSU has embarked on a big project in Africa focused on rabies control among the large populations of dogs. Rabid dog bites account for an estimated 65,000 human deaths a year, mostly in Africa and Asia, and many of those bitten are children.

Beyond WSU, the University of Washington and many other institutions of higher education throughout Washington are similarly doing many wonderful things in Africa.

We know that while Africa has much promise and many cities in Africa are just as modern as any city in Europe or the U.S., there remain barriers that need to be overcome.

These include the development of infrastructure for roads, railroads, air and more. Ready supplies of clean water remains an issue in many parts of the continent, and water is needed for industrial development too. Electricity is not available everywhere. While many nations within have excellent university systems, there is also a universal need to improve the educational level across the continent, especially in the remote areas where residents receive a grade school education at best.

These may be challenges, but they can also be seen as opportunities and as problems that we can solve together. Africa is really not all that far away.

So as you can see the state of Washington and many countries within Africa are connected through, economics, education and health and that we have already started connecting and building opportunities and partnerships. It is what Peter Gishuru envisioned several years ago when he came to me with a goal of connecting Washington to African countries and looking for support for a chamber of commerce that links our two regions together.

Today we can again build on that goal. So, let's start here today and look at as a region where we can build exciting new partnerships and work together to improve lives and prosperity with our friends in a land of such great potential. To our guests from outside the state of Washington, some all the way from Africa, we sincerely welcome you to our great state.

But before you leave be sure to enjoy a cup of the best coffee in the world and a glass of the finest wine in the world; that is Washington wine of course.

I wish you all great success and prosperity.

Thank you.