



**PROPOSED REMARKS FOR DELIVERY BY DEPUTY MINISTER FOR WOMEN, YOUTH
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, MS MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE ON THE
OCCASION OF THE 248TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA
12 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Your Excellency, Ambassador Brigety II
Members of the Diplomatic Corps and International Organizations
Officials of Government and business leaders
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

We feel immensely honoured that on this important day you invited us to join you as you celebrate the 248th Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America. I am particularly privileged as a representative of the Government and the people of the Republic of South Africa to express our warmest congratulations to you on your great achievement. Happy birthday!

Your Excellency, we would like to also express our sincere gratitude for the warm welcome with which you received us today. We are indeed grateful for this gesture.

Yesterday, the peace-loving people throughout the world have commemorated the 23rd anniversary of the fateful September 11 event. We have a collective duty to reaffirm our united resolve to create a world free of the fear of terrorism, free of wars and starvation.

Inspired by our Africanness, and the spirit of Ubuntu, on this sacred Heritage month, we continue to convey a message of solidarity and friendship to the American people and assure them that we stand with them as they renew their own commitment to the spirit of their Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation through the memorable renditions of “The Star-Spangled Banner”.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests,

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Today we recall that it was in July 1776 that the people of United States of America took a decisive stand and severed ties with their colonisers. Americans decided to restore their dignity and reclaimed their being as humans. In 1994, South Africans inspired by the decisive actions of many countries, including the US, decided to embark on a journey of restoration.

A journey that remained painful and often a violent one. Indeed, a free South Africa is especially indebted to the USA and many other countries throughout the world who worked hard to shore up support for the struggle against apartheid. We can never thank you enough. The special bonds of solidarity and friendship that were forged between the anti-Apartheid and Civil Rights Movements should be revived and nurtured in support of a different cause, which is racial and economic justice, and to give dignity to our people.

Indeed, as we embarked on this journey to prosecute our struggle for a better life for all since our transition to democracy in 1994, the United States has remained an important partner and friend to South Africa.

Over the years we have exchanged many high-level visits and held numerous engagements aimed at pursuing our common interests and mutually beneficial outcomes in the various sectors in which we have robust cooperation.

As you are aware, trade and investment between our countries remains the backbone of our historic relations. Our bilateral cooperation continues to deepen and expand to include diversified portfolios, while our economic relations continue to grow from strength to strength, anchored by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which has made South Africa one of the biggest non-oil exporters to the US.

The statistics speaks for themselves: From 2022 to 2023, South African agricultural exports to the US increased by 2.69% (from R8.6 billion in 2022 to R8.9 billion in 2023). During the same period, South African imports from the US increased by 4.26% from R4 billion in 2022 to R4.2 billion in 2023. There is potential for us to do much more.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests,

As you know, we have established the Government of National Unity, and this is unprecedented in the history of our democracy. Our people in casting their votes during the recently concluded elections on 29 May 2024, directed the leadership of political parties to work together to deliver on a mandate of transformation, growth and renewal of our country.

We are optimistic that the GNU, guided by its Statement of Intent, will deliver on all its priorities, including rapid, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and the creation of a more just society by tackling poverty and inequality.

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We are indeed proud to call the US our second biggest trade and investment partner and one of the top sources of inbound tourism. A number of US companies have major investments in South Africa and employ thousands of South African workers, while others have trade and industrial relationships with some South African State- Owned Enterprises.

The GNU will also prioritise the enhancement of bilateral relations with our key partners, including the US. We already have a well-documented history of cooperation with USAID in support of the South African Government's priorities through capacity building and skills development, most notably in the health sector, which is held in high regard, as well as scientific and technical co-operation.

The recent participation in the 21st AGOA Forum in Washington DC by our Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition was highly successful and we welcome the overwhelming support for the early renewal of AGOA by the Administration, Congress, Business and Labour. We are hopeful that the recommendations put forward by the African Ministers of Trade to modernise AGOA will be taken on board in the new AGOA legislation. One of the key recommendations called for closer collaboration between AGOA and the AfCFTA to ensure that AGOA becomes more inclusive, responsive, and transformative – and deliver a win-win relationship for all segments of society.

We are encouraged by ongoing positive recognition of important role played by AGOA for our Continent and US. Indeed, AGOA has been the cornerstone of Africa-US relations and remain instrumental in facilitating regional integration through value chains to enhance African value-added exports into the US, as well as enhance distribution networks, and intra-sub-Saharan Africa trade and investment.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests,

We also appreciate the decision by Congress to re-authorise the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for another year. We were hoping for a multi-year renewal given the huge success of this programme.

More recently, we have begun to accelerate our work on the Just Energy Transition (JET). In this regard, the US has availed \$1 billion of the \$8.5 billion dollars that was pledged to South Africa by developed countries during COP 26. We look forward to the full implementation of the JET Investment Plan and invite US investors to take advantage of these opportunities.

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It will be remiss of me not to mention the exciting YALI programme and the Atlanta Phambili initiative. We look forward to further strengthening our trade, business, investment and skills exchange opportunities through these initiatives.

I also wish the United States well in your forthcoming elections in November.

In conclusion, I wish to, on behalf of President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Government and the people of the Republic of South Africa, propose a toast to President Joe Biden, the Government and the people of the United States of America, on the celebration of the 248th Independence Day!

Phambili!