



**Remarks by**

**Fred Oladeinde, Chair, AGOA Civil Society Network**

**at the Opening Ceremony of the CSO Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> US-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum**

**June 12, 2012**  
**Washington, D.C.**

Good morning: Your Excellencies Ambassadors, Congressional Staff, members of the executive branch, District of Columbia Council members and staff the private sector, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of members of the AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network, the 2012 AGOA Civil Society Working Group and CSOs represented at this gathering, today, I welcome you to the civil society organization opening Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> US-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum - AGOA 2012.

The AGOA Civil Society Organization Network is a consortium of NGOs small to medium sized businesses, chambers of commerce and those interested in benefiting both the US and Africa through successful application of the AGOA legislation. We seek to improve the ease with which trade between the US and Africa is done and also seeks avenues through which AGOA can further integrate Africa into the global economy. The network was established in Phoenix Mauritius during the second US-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation forum hosted by the government of Mauritius.

Since the passage of AGOA in 2000 by President Bill Clinton, and subsequent amendments and extensions by President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama, AGOA has improved US-Africa Trade and economic relationships over the past 11 years, creating jobs and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and expanding economic and political freedom, while improving living and human rights standards across eligible countries in Sub Sahara Africa.

Africa's collective gross domestic product was \$1.7 trillion in 2010, and is expected to increase to \$4 trillion in 2020. Consumer spending is also forecasted to rise from \$880 billion in 2010 to \$2.6 trillion in 2020. Simply, there is opportunity in Africa. There is also

immense potential for increasing exports from Africa to the US and stronger trade and cultural ties between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, current uncertainties — firstly, in the textile sector, the expiration of Third Country Fabric Provision (TCF) by September 2012, less than 90 days from today and secondly, the expiration of AGOA by 2015 calls for a clear and engaging US policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa that will provide the enabling environment for mutually beneficial trade and investment framework to increase trade and cultural ties.

On behalf of the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network, I call on the Obama Administration and the Republican leadership in Congress to pass the extension of the third country fabric provision of AGOA, TODAY. Market information clearly shows a decline of over 25% in orders placed for Africa garments; the result of inaction on the part of Congress, will only lead to more suffering among the most vulnerable group — the poor and shrinks the expansion of private sector in one of the fastest growing emerging markets in the world.

Given current geo-political trends and the re-alignment of global financial and economic architecture, the AGOA CSO Network calls for a review of AGOA in its current form including an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of AGOA -- with the view of coming up with enhancements to current US-Africa Trade and Economic policy that will withstand current challenges in the market place from countries, such as Russia and China; and the extension of AGOA and the Third Country Fabric provision to 2025.

We urge the United States to provide technical and diplomatic support to ongoing integration programs in Africa at all levels, leading to a Continental Free Trade Area by 2019.

The expansion of political space for non-governmental organizations remains the silver bullet of a democracy in the defense of human rights, political and economic freedom, citizens' empowerment and the expansion of private sector, and the divide that separates well from bad governance. The appointment of a special advisor to the Secretary of State on civil society is a welcome proposition by AGOA CSO Network; we welcome Dr. Tomimah Tillemann to this position and look forward to his speech this morning.

During our two days of deliberations, we will examine the following issues: AGOA - Challenges and Opportunities; Civil Society's Role in Effecting Legislative Reforms that Enhance US Africa Trade Beyond the Expiration of AGOA in 2015; Africa's Regional Integration and Bilateral Trade Facilitation Efforts; Strengthening African SME's Capacity to Diversify Imports under AGOA; Technical Assistance & Capacity Building to Support Expansion in the Africa's Agricultural Sector; Engaging the Diaspora as Culture Brokers for US-Africa

Trade and Investment Expansion; Public Private Partnerships: A Platform for Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship; and Trade and Gender: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs. This year's Session will take place at a number of venues. The Opening Ceremony and day one activities will take place here at the Washington Plaza hotel, tomorrow; Wednesday, June 13, 2012, events have been scheduled at the Woodrow Wilson Center and the Brookings Institution. On June 15<sup>th</sup> CSOs will present their recommendations to the Ministerial Session.

It is my honor to welcome our distinguished speakers to the opening session:

Ambassador Sheila Siwela, Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia to the United States and the Chair, the AGOA Ministerial Planning Committee;

Ambassador Amina Ali, African Union Ambassador to the United States:

Ms. Flori Liser, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa;

Mr. Micheal Curtis Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa USAID;

Dr. Tomicah Tillemann, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies, US Department of State, Ladies and gentlemen please

Please welcome H.E. Sheila Siwela to the podium -----