Remarks by Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit’s African and Diaspora Young Leaders Forum

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As Delivered

Thank you all so much for joining us today. My name is Wally Adeyemo, and I am the Deputy Secretary of the United States Treasury.

I want to thank the President of Ghana for being here today and for his efforts to strengthen the African Diaspora community. The success of Ghana’s Year of Return in 2019 is an inspiring example of how to draw on the United States’ large and engaged diaspora communities to build closer ties between Ghana, Africa more broadly and the United States.

For me, a number of my friends had an opportunity to go to the continent for the first time during the year of the return and to think about their role and their relationship with the continent that we have all come from. The Diaspora’s role in shaping American society and culture, and the way its members contribute to the dynamism of our economy are themes that are deeply personal to me. The story of the African American diaspora is one that is part of my story. My parents, although they raised me in Southern California, came to this country with me in hand, immigrating here from Nigeria. And while they brought me from Nigeria, like many African stories, they touched on many different countries in their journey in Africa, growing up in Ghana, I’m oftentimes in our house, we had Kenkey for dinner, at the same time that you would have foods from Nigeria. So it spoke to the diversity of experiences that Africans bring to this country all the time. And I think that bringing that perspective to the Treasury Department, where I have the ability to serve the American people, as to the rich legacy of this country as well, a country built on immigration, and the contributions the members of the Diaspora make here big and small matter greatly to the United States economy and to our culture.

But the Diaspora also contributes to Africa, a Brookings study estimating that the Diaspora last year contributed $46 billion in remittances to Africa. And beyond the economic contribution,
the People-to-people engagement creates ties that imbued this country and Africa with deep knowledge and a shared sense of common aspirations.

Strengthening this community at forums like this one allow us to cement and deepen these ties. In doing so, we exchange openly and freely about challenges – and I am aware of the multiple shocks facing African countries today – and it's something that we should speak about openly and transparently.

As all of you know, I am not the most senior person to serve in the U.S. government from the African Diaspora. I had an opportunity to work for President Obama, both in his administration but also helping to run his foundation. And part of what all of us know, as young leaders in the African Diaspora, which I consider myself part of this community, is that critical to our abilities to succeed is being able to see ourselves and leaders who have come before us. Finding the type of mentors and examples that have blazed a path for us. And today, I have the ability to introduce one of those mentors for me, one of those leaders who have blazed a path that has allowed me to be in the role that I'm in today, and that is Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris.

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