

July 4, 2006
Remarks
Chargé d’Affaires Don Teitelbaum

Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Ms. Lulama Xingwana
Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Apostolic Nuncio
Heads of Permanent Diplomatic Missions
Deputy Minister of Safety and Security Susan Shabangu
Judge Johann van der Westhuizen of the Constitutional Court
Mayor of the City of Tshwane, Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa
Fellow Americans and Honored Guests

On behalf of the U.S. Mission to South Africa, welcome to this celebration of the 230th year of American independence. Americans around the world are gathering as we are today to celebrate the history and values that define who we are as a nation and a people.

Of course, we share many of those values with the people of South Africa, including our enduring faith in personal freedoms and democratic institutions.

As we reflect on our 230 years of independence, it warrants recalling that the U.S. and South Africa both have long and complex histories, and relations between our peoples are similarly long and complex. In fact, the linkages and relationships between the U.S. and South Africa extend to the earliest days of our nation.

You might be surprised to learn, for example, that the first American Consul to the then colonial outpost of Cape Town was one John Elmslie Jr. appointed in 1799. This appointment resulted in Cape Town being among the first U.S. diplomatic outposts in the world.

Mr. Elmslie’s tenure as Consul was not without its challenges however, the chief of which was the refusal of local British authorities to recognize that the United States was no longer a British Colony. The Acting Governor, General Francis Dundas, wrote in a letter to Elmslie, “Sir, remember you are a British Subject only, cloaked under an American certificate, and if you persist in such improper conduct towards the Government, or appear in

public as you have done (i.e. in a United States Naval uniform), I will try you and punish you, Sir, as a subject under His Majesty's allegiance. Remember before whom you are, and that you are in a British Colony." (I am pleased to note that the current British High Commissioner has a more enlightened attitude.)

Our presence in Durban was not far behind. The first U.S. Consular Agent at Port Natal (now Durban) was appointed in 1847, and Durban was elevated to a Consulate exactly 100 years ago, in July of 1906. (The same year as the Bambatha rebellion led by Bambatha kaMancinza of the Zondi clan of the Amazulu.)

These early diplomatic relations were complemented by the presence of influential private Americans in South Africa. One notable example of this was a man named Yankee Wood, an African American ship steward who came to Port Elizabeth during the American Civil War. Mr. Wood initially worked in the diamond fields, and eventually opened hotels in Kokstad and a small gold mining town called Johannesburg.

American and South African cultural history is also intertwined, with no better example than in the cross-fertilization in music. In 1890, a minstrel troupe from Virginia called Orpheus McAdoo's Jubilee Singers toured South Africa – the first of five such tours over ten years.

The troupe performed spirituals, folk songs, minstrel shows, and dances that launched a musical relationship with South African musicians, choirs, and social clubs that continues to resonate today in both North American and South Africa.

Of course, the historical links between our two nations extend well beyond diplomatic appointments and musical synergies. Many of you will be familiar with the South African Air Force's elite 2 Squadron, the Flying Cheetahs, which has been involved in every single combat operation in which the SAAF has taken part. Few know, however, that when the United Nations responded to the Korean conflict by authorizing an international military response, Cheetah Squadron served alongside the US Air Force's 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing from November 1950 to the ceasefire in 1953.

The Squadron's distinguished record of service in Korea, including more than 12,000 sorties and the loss of 34 pilots, earned many commendations,

including the United States Presidential Unit Citation, an honor seldom accorded a non-U.S. unit.

In more recent times, the relationship between the United States and South Africa has logically been defined by the struggle against apartheid. None of us Americans lived through or participated in our own independence struggle. South Africa's quest for freedom, on the other hand, is a fresh memory for many. While the success of that quest is only a dozen years behind us, the struggle spanned decades and touched the lives of millions here and around the world.

I hardly have to tell our South African guests that among the seminal moments of this nation's struggle was the start of the Soweto uprising almost exactly thirty years ago. It would be hard to overstate the impact of the images of the violence in Soweto that were transmitted to the U.S. and around the world at the time, which revealed to many of us for the first time the true nature of apartheid.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of an American presence in Soweto in the form of the U.S. library, recently renamed in honor of U.S. civil rights legend Rosa Parks. During the uprising this library served as a vital source of information about the outside world as well as a meeting place and refuge for those determined to fight for freedom.

One newspaper story from the early years of the American Library described the presence of this institution this way: "American information officials are stirring up the black population of South Africa. The fact that they have opened a reading room in Soweto is incomprehensible. The present interference could be so dangerous that it could start a full-scale war in Southern Africa." High praise, indeed. Today, the Rosa Parks library serves students who need information resources and a place to study – less dramatic than its older role, but perhaps just as important in the long run.

Today, our relationship continues to grow and mature. Just over a year ago, Presidents Bush and Mbeki met in Washington to chart the future of our relationship, and issued a joint statement pledging to deepen the bonds of cooperation and strengthen our shared values of peace and prosperity. Among the areas in which the Presidents pledged cooperation were health, housing, trade and investment, security, and regional conflict resolution.

That pledge is already being realized in many ways, through public and private initiatives, in business, government, and academic settings. Our economic ties, for example, have never been stronger, with two-way trade reaching 9.5 billion dollars in 2005. Let me note that the trade balance runs about 2 to 1 in South Africa's favor, including more than 1.5 billion dollars in South African exports under the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

On the issues of law and order, our nations are also constructive partners. The U.S., through our International Law Enforcement Academies, is supporting the professional development of South Africa's law enforcement personnel. We Americans are all-too acquainted with crime. Although we have made dramatic progress in reducing our own national rates of violent crime, (Since 1993, violent crime has fallen by 57 percent and property crime by 50%) we know that addressing these challenges sometimes comes at a high cost. In that light, I want to pass to the government our deepest condolences on the recent loss of police officers in the line of duty.

I would be remiss in not mentioning an urgent area of bilateral cooperation outlined by our Presidents - the need to expand our shared struggle against HIV/AIDS. There are few issues to which President Bush is more personally devoted than this effort, a devotion he demonstrated in announcing the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, better known as PEPFAR, in 2003.

Surprisingly few people understand PEPFAR, so let me be clear: PEPFAR is designed to provide prevention, care, and treatment in support of the South African Government's own Comprehensive Plan. Strictly speaking, there are no "PEPFAR sites." In all our sites, PEPFAR is working with the South African Government, NGOs, or both. In South Africa, PEPFAR cooperates with the South African Government's Departments of Health, Defense, Correctional Services, Education, Justice, and Social Development. PEPFAR also has over 300 additional NGO partners, 80% of which are South African organizations.

Two and a half years on, these partnerships are making a difference in South Africa and around the world. Today more than 75,000 South Africans are receiving antiretroviral (ARV) treatment through programs directly supported by the Emergency Plan. Approximately 1800 sites across the country are providing palliative care services with the help of the Emergency

Plan, assisting over 200,000 South Africans. By the end of 2008, we anticipate that the PEPFAR program in South Africa will be helping to support the provision of effective ARV-based AIDS treatment for 500,000 South Africans, to provide care for 2.6 million orphans, vulnerable children, and other individuals, and will have prevented approximately 1.8 million new HIV infections.

These goals and accomplishments are something about which President Mbeki and President Bush can be justifiably proud. But they will only be achieved and remain sustainable if all the partners continue to work cooperatively.

As you all know, the U.S. Mission has been without an Ambassador since the departure of Ambassador Frazer in August of last year. For those who may not be aware, in April of this year, President Bush nominated Eric Bost to become the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of South Africa. Mr. Bost is currently the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services at our Department of Agriculture, and previously Commissioner of the Texas Department of Human Services.

Mr. Bost's nomination was confirmed by the U.S. Senate last week in accordance with its Constitutional mandate to advise and consent on all such nominations by the President. I hope that our new Chief of Mission will arrive in the coming weeks.

I can assure you that no one more keenly anticipates the arrival of a new Ambassador than I, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our South African counterparts for their cooperation and my Mission colleagues for their tremendous support and assistance during my extended tenure as Chargé d'Affaires.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure to have you all with us today as we celebrate our independence day. In the U.S., this day is marked by family gatherings, public concerts, hotdogs, and fireworks. While we can't reproduce all those elements today, we do come together as friends and colleagues, to celebrate the values, goals, and history that we share.

I would like to propose a toast:

To the health of His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa and to the continued success and friendship of the People of South Africa.