



***Fred O. Oladeinde***

***Chairman, AGOA Civil Society Organization Network***

***Opening remarks***

***5<sup>th</sup> Annual AGOA Spring Conference***

***Chancery of Côte d'Ivoire***

***Washington, D.C.***

H.E. Mohamed Haidara, Ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire to the United States of America; Honorable Mrs. Nialé Kaba, Minister of Planning and Development, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire; Honorable Anoble Miezan Felix, State Secretary for Small Medium Enterprise Promotion, The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire; Other Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire present; Mr. Guy M'Bengue, Chief Executive Officer of APEX-CI and Chairman of the Technical Organization Committee for AGOA Forum 2019

Representatives of the United States Government: Deputy U.S Trade Representative for Africa Bennett Harman; Elizabeth Pelletreau, Office of Economic and Regional Affairs, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Excellences, Ambassadors representing AGOA eligible countries; Excellences, Ambassadors, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Speakers; Colleagues, Members of the AGOA CSO Advisory Board, Members of the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network, Members of the African Women Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP), Members of the Young Africa Leadership Initiative (YALI), Members of the Press, and Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honored and delighted to welcome you to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual AGOA CSO Network Spring Conference on behalf of the Secretariat, I thank you for your presence at the 2019 AGOA Spring Conference.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Civil Society Network was established at the end on the AGOA Civil Society Forum in Phoenix, Mauritius on January 17, 2003, with the 102 member organizations from the United States, Mauritius, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia, Mali, Lesotho, and the Democratic Republic of Congo that were in attendance. Members empowered the Secretariat to make all necessary preparations for the next AGOA Civil Society Session of the AGOA Forum.

The AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network is a consortium of non- governmental organizations, small to medium sized businesses; chambers of commerce and other groups in the United States and Africa that are committed to the successful application of AGOA benefits for the purpose of deepening trade and investment ties with the African people and the people of the United States.

Over the last one and half decade, AGOA has helped sub Saharan countries increase exports and supported hundreds of thousands of jobs in Africa; however, we CAN do more, We MUST do More

Excellences, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen by 2050 Africa's population is projected to reach 2.8 billion, from the current 1.2 billion. Sixty percent of the population is below the age of 35 years and Africa's middle class is growing. African countries stand to provide the youthful workforce and talent that is key to driving global development and making Africa the center of global commerce and trade. It is also expected that African countries will become strategic partners to the United States by 2050.

Currently, Africa is experiencing an expansion in small and medium enterprise (SMEs) development. Today, SMEs with strong participation by women entrepreneurs create approximately 80% of the region's employment, and SMEs are establishing a new middle class and fueling demand for new goods and services. However, African SMEs face a number of hurdles, including: supply chain constraints, logistical issues, lack of access to financing, and other

barriers that limit their competitiveness in domestic and export markets.

That is why we are gathered here, today, for the Spring Conference under the theme “*AGOA: Advancing Mutual Prosperity through Trade and Economic Cooperation*” at the Chancery of Côte d’Ivoire - the host of the 2019 AGOA Forum along with members of the Administration, and tomorrow on Capitol Hill, with members of the U.S. Congress, during AGOA Advocacy Day to focus on innovative ways to deepen trade and investment ties. Excellences, colleagues’ members, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen – our mission compels us to come up with innovative approaches on how to use the remaining six years of AGOA benefits to diversify AGOA exports from across sub-Saharan Africa from ALL AGOA eligible countries; making the Trump Administration’s signature programs under Prosper Africa, a more robust success.

Please join me in welcoming the delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo. May I ask that the delegation please stand and be recognized, please, let us give them a round of applause. Again, the Secretariat congratulates the people of DRC on recent peaceful elections and transfer of power in their country that for the first time in more than 50 years resulted in a democratically elected government.

In closing, let me request your full participation over the next two days, here, in Washington, DC and between now and August 3rd, 2019, as we prepare for the 18<sup>th</sup> AGOA Forum in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire., so that we can have the best Forum ever. And as we move forward, let us work collectively to optimize the benefits of AGOA to create badly needed good paying jobs, particularly for our youth, and expand US-Sub Saharan Africa trade and economic cooperation.

I now call on Ms. Jeannine Scott to present H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Haidara, the Ambassador of Côte d’Ivoire to the United States and our gracious host.

**I thank you.**