

## **AAI “Meet & Greet” Reception**

### **REMARKS BY AAI PRESIDENT & CEO AMINI KAJUNJU**

**3.25.15**

Good evening, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen and Honored Guests. Thank you for joining us tonight for our “Meet and Greet” Washington Reception.

My name is Amini Kajunju and I am President and CEO of The Africa-America Institute.

As I look across the room, it’s good to see so many familiar faces and new friends of AAI.

I’d like to welcome U.S. government officials, the African diplomatic community, and other special guests for attending tonight’s reception.

Tonight is a *homecoming* for AAI in many ways. For over five decades, we had a strong presence in Washington where we helped to shape and influence U.S.-Africa policy and raise awareness about issues related to the continent among the American public.

Indeed, it’s good to be back in D.C. ... We opened our office last year, under the direction of our Government Affairs Representative, Austin Cooper, and it has gotten off to a great start. Our Government Relations office is charged with building and maintaining contacts with the current Administration and U.S. government officials, Members of Congress, corporations, NGOs and the diplomatic community to promote the mission and priorities of AAI.

Please allow me to extend a very special thank you to Steve Pfeiffer, a member of our board of trustees, who so kindly provides us the office space to operate in Washington, D.C. Thank you, Steve, for your commitment to AAI.

We've re-launched and re-branded what was formerly known as the *Africa Thursday Congressional Series*. The new Washington forum is now called *Conversations on Africa* or C-O-A. The first COA on the extension of AGOA featured panelists from Congress, U.S. government agencies, private sector, civil society, and the diplomatic community.

We have upcoming COAs on the horizon that we hope you'll attend. The next COA will focus on "Financial Aid for African University Students", and will be held on April 29 at the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. We're moving our COA out into congressional districts, and will hold a panel discussion on science and technology in African universities in Los Angeles this July.

It is such a privilege for me to be here with you this evening to share AAI's upcoming activities and explore how we can work together to advance progress and prosperity in Africa.

AAI has provided strong leadership in strengthening Africa's human capacity for 62 years. With 23,000 alumni worldwide, we proudly count Heads of State, U.N. officials, corporate leaders, activists and Nobel laureates as part of our distinguished network of alumni.

At this point, allow me to share with you AAI's current goals and objectives. There are three pillars that guide our work: (1) **Education and Skills Building**; (2) **Program Management and Implementation** and (3) **Convening Activities**

Today, AAI is more relevant than ever.

We are considering opportunities to train Tanzanian coffee professionals and we are also working to secure a program that will increase the capacity of medical professionals in East Africa.

With some 200-million young people across the continent, investing in the next generation of African leaders is critical in accelerating Africa's development progress.

In an interconnected world, African youth must gain the knowledge, technical know-how and managerial skills necessary to compete and win in a global economy.

Only 6% of young people in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in higher education institutions, compared to the global average of 26%.

We must change that.

That is why we're excited to share with you that, this year, AAI will launch the **Future Leaders Legacy Fund**. The Legacy Fund is a multi-year campaign that will provide Africa's brightest, yet under-resourced students with scholarships to study in top-performing African universities and technical colleges.

I am energized by having just returned from Dakar, Senegal for a conference on African Higher Education, attended by African Ministers of Education, practitioners, educators and global philanthropy. I am confident in saying that AAI is advancing the right themes, at the right time. A dominant narrative at the conference was "**African Higher education must resume its rightful place in the development strategy of the continent.**"

In this first phase of the fund, we will select only the very best universities that Africa has to offer and provide under-resourced students access to universities that may be out of their reach to due financial difficulties.

In phase 2, the Legacy Fund aims to strengthen our partner African universities through academic training and exchanges, curriculum development and administrative, management, leadership capacity-building projects.

We hope you will take part in this important effort. Every person in Africa who wants a good college education should get one. And, it is now time to consider African universities, as a place of excellence and innovation.

We continue to strengthen our convening activities. To that end, building on last year's successful State of Education in Africa conference in New York,

in partnership with The Ford Foundation, AAI will host on September 2, the Second Annual State of Education in Africa conference. This year's conference will be in Lagos, Nigeria.

Educators and innovators from Africa will gather to assess the progress of primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational education in Africa and highlight bold approaches to improving the quality of education.

You're most welcome to Lagos in September! If you're not able to attend, we plan to produce a State of Education in Africa report and will share outcomes from the conference.

Our spectacular Awards Gala has a new name – The Future Leaders Legacy Fund Awards Gala. The gala will be held on September 21, in New York City, during the opening week of the UN General Assembly. As always, the gala will highlight the best that Africa has to offer and provide an opportunity to raise money for the new scholarship fund. Stay tuned for more details.

I sincerely **Thank You** for your attendance to this evening's reception. I'd like to thank our trustee Steve Pfeiffer and his team at Norton Rose Fulbright for hosting us tonight.

I'll look forward to meeting each and every one of you and to learn more about how we can work together to invest in Africa's future. Please know that I do not stand on formality, but rather look forward to the opportunity to roll up our sleeves and advance this critically important mission.

Good night.