



This week, 1,000 of sub-Saharan Africa's most promising young leaders visited Washington, D.C. to meet and collaborate with U.S. government, private sector and civil society leaders as the culmination of their Mandela Washington Fellowship experience.

On Wednesday, August 3, President Obama spoke to the 2016 Mandela Fellowship participants in a town hall meeting. The following is an excerpt from his [remarks](#), which also included a Q&A portion.



Today, I'm proud to welcome all of you, the third class of Mandela Fellows. More than 40,000 people applied. You're our biggest class yet – double the size of the previous year – 1,000 YALI fellows strong. And for the last six weeks, you've been studying and learning at some of America's best universities. Today, you're not just Mandela Fellows but you're also Hawkeyes and Buckeyes, and – (applause) – Sun Devils. We've got some Fighting Irish here. We've got our first class of Energy Fellows – (applause) – young people at UC-Davis studying new ways to promote clean energy and fight climate change.

And not only have you been studying and learning, but you've also immersed yourself in American culture. You've looked at sites from our nation's founding in Boston and Philadelphia. You've visited the 9/11 Memorial in New York. You've spent time in my hometown of Chicago. So you've got a taste of America, which, for some of you, apparently included something called lobster ice cream, which I've never tasted myself. But I have to admit, it sounds terrible. But that's okay. You were very brave.

You've also gotten a front-row seat on the fascinating roller coaster process of American democracy, because you're here during election seasons. And I hope you've buckled your seatbelts. But it actually has been a good lesson and a reminder democracy is hard everywhere – even in the world's oldest, continuous democracy. It's always challenging and it is always messy. But as you're watching our election, I want you to know that one of the things that leaders in Washington agree on, on both sides of the political aisle – Republicans and Democrats – is the importance of a strong American partnership with the nations and peoples of Africa. That's true today. I'm confident it will be true for years to come.



So we're going to keep standing with you. America is going to keep standing with activists like Geline Fuko of Tanzania. Where's Geline? Geline is a lawyer and human rights activist. A few years ago, she thought people in Tanzania should be able to use their mobile phones to read their constitution, so she went out and designed Tanzania's first – (applause) – she designed Tanzania's first database of constitutional resources, opening up her government to more of her people so they could understand their law and their rights and their responsibilities. So thank you so much, Geline, for the great work.

We're going to keep standing with social entrepreneurs like Awa Caba of Senegal. Whoa. Where is Awa? Where? You're over here. So who was this guy who jumped up? He's what you call your hype man. He was hyping you up.

So Awa co-founded a tech hub to offer free training for women in coding and IT skills. And she also started an e-commerce platform to help Senegalese women take their products, whether it's cosmetics or fruits or jams "to the market and the world." Because Awa knows that when our women succeed, our countries succeed. So thank you, Awa, for the good work.

We're going to keep standing with strivers like Mamba Francisco of Angola. Where's Mamba? Mamba is his own hype man.

So two years ago, he wanted to be a Mandela Fellow, but he didn't qualify because he didn't speak English. So he buckled down – he studied, he learned. And he's here today helping other young people in Angola learn to read and write and make it to college. So, thank you.



And finally, we'll stand together in memory of John Paul Usman. As many of you know, John Paul was a bright young leader from Nigeria who inspired people around the world with his work for peace. Tragically, he lost his life this year, for the first time, Americans travel to Africa to visit Mandela Fellows in their home communities so that Americans – (applause) – so that Americans can learn about development and community building and more from Africans. And even more Americans will participate in this exchange next year. It's also why I'm excited to announce new support from the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the U.S. African Development Foundation, and the Citi Foundation, to provide even more Africans with grants and professional opportunities. Give them a big round of applause for their support.

Because this is a two-way street. For all the experiences that you're gaining here in the United States, we're learning from you. We're energized by your passion. We're learning from your perspectives. And that's why this year, for the first time, Americans travel to Africa to visit Mandela Fellows in their home communities so that Americans – (applause) – so that Americans can learn about development and community building and more from Africans. And even more Americans will participate in this exchange next year. It's also why I'm excited to announce new support from the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the U.S. African Development Foundation, and the Citi Foundation, to provide even more Africans with grants and professional opportunities. Give them a big round of applause for their support.

So these partnerships don't just change the lives of young people like you, they're also energizing our countries and shaping our world. We've created programs like this not just in Africa, but in Southeast Asia, in the Americas, in Europe. So you're part of a huge and growing network of the next generation of leaders around the world. And while I'm going to leave it up to historians to decide my overall legacy, one of the things that I'm really proud of is my partnership with young people like you because all of you inspire me.

So years from now, when you're running a big business, or doing a great nonprofit, or leading your country as a president or a prime minister, or a minister of finance or something, my hope is that you can look back and you will keep drawing from strength and the experience that you've gotten here.

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