

**Statement by Chairman Christopher Smith**  
**House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights**  
**November 16, 2011**

On November 16, several Congressional colleagues and I convened the first House-Senate Conversation between Congress and the African Diplomatic Corps on African issues. This historic event was opened by me, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Ranking Member Donald Payne, Senate Africa Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Coons and Senate Africa Subcommittee Ranking Member Johnny Isakson. We were joined during the event by Representative Karen Bass and Representative Bobby Rush.

Democratic Republic of the Congo Ambassador Faida Mitifu presented a comprehensive overview of the African diplomatic corps on the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and trade, agriculture and food security and energy and infrastructure. She also joined us in presiding over this session.

Too often, we in Congress have only brief encounters with the African diplomats in Washington, and a fuller, ongoing interaction would be of help to both Members of Congress and diplomats in building U.S.-Africa relations that are mutually beneficial.

In our Subcommittee hearings, we conduct oversight on issues of concern involving U.S. policy – often regarding individual countries. For troubled countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe, such U.S. policy oversight is critical. However, the issues we are covering today require interactions that are more detailed and more sustained. Trade, agriculture and energy are important matters that call for the kind of discussions that go beyond an office visit or even today's dialogue.

It is the hope of our members and the diplomatic corps that we can use this initial event as the beginning of ongoing discussions on how to make AGOA more broadly beneficial for the nearly 6,400 covered items, for example. We need to better understand how to overcome the obstacles to successful U.S.-Africa agricultural trade. One comment was repeated by several diplomats: further delay in passing legislation to extend AGOA's third-party fabric provision will send damaging mixed signals to investors.

Africa's population of approximately 1 billion people has a growing consumer base that is capable of being a larger player in global trade. One out of every three Africans is now considered to be in the middle class. This rising middle class will enable both economic and political development in Africa. For the United States and other developed nations, these developments benefit us as well by providing an enhanced market for our products and allowing African countries a larger tax base that will lessen the need for foreign aid. More robust African economies are beneficial to the entire global economy.

We also have to work more effectively to help African nations produce more energy for themselves and developed world consumers such as the United States. As Ambassador Mitifu pointed out in her opening statement, current trends indicate that less than half of Africa's population will have access to electricity by 2050. She and her colleagues called on our

government to support such projects as the Grand Inga Dam project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which would contribute 39,000 megawatts for a continent-wide electricity grid.

A major theme among the comments and questions by the diplomats who participated in this event was concern about security and a desire to partner with the United States in combating terrorism, trafficking in persons, the international drug trade, piracy and other criminal activity that affects the continent.

As we all know, the United States faces a reduced ability to fund programs at previous levels. Consequently, we are working to ensure that the funds we do have are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. In order to maximize these goals, we must have a better idea of the actual needs of African societies. In everything we do together, there must be collaboration and the goal of mutual benefit. A win-win situation is sustainable, but programs aimed at only one beneficiary are not.

Deciding for Africans what their needs may be is not an appropriate strategy. We need African governments to be stakeholders in whatever programs we fund, and that will not be likely if they are not consulted in advance. Better program targeting requires partnership, and we hope this session is part of the creation of an enhanced partnership between us.