

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 21, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF TOASTS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND

WILLIAM R. TOLBERT, JR.
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

THE STATE DINING ROOM

10:25 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: President Tolbert and Mrs. Tolbert, Mrs. Ford and all of our guests welcome you to the United States and to the White House on this occasion.

Your visit, Mr. President, is a particularly gratifying occasion because of our very special relationship with Liberia and the fact that this is the first African State visit of our third century of independence to the United States.

President Monroe presided in this very building at the time when blacks from this country created Liberia and named your capital city, Monrovia, after President Monroe. The founding of Liberia is a tribute to the conscience of mankind. As President of Liberia, you have served not only as your country's leader but also have inspired millions throughout the world by your spiritual calling.

As an ordained Baptist minister you were the first black elected President of the Baptist World Alliance, and we are proud that that election was held in the United States.

We meet at a time on this occasion when both the United States and Liberia are mindful of the very great problems in Southern Africa. We agree on the urgent need for action, for peace and justice for all of the peoples of Africa.

The friendship linking our two countries is no accident, Mr. President. Our relations rest upon a basis, a foundation of shared values even to the shared red, white and blue of our two respective flags.

MORE

Our relationship is nurtured by the mutual respect that evolved over many, many years to meet many of our mutual challenges.

Mr. President, we will face the challenges of today with the insights and with the determination developed through our past cooperation. We share not only a special relationship, but also a very special responsibility to others.

Liberia and the United States are, after all, distinctive among nations. Ours are the oldest existing Republics on our respective continents. Our Constitutions, both written long, long ago, remain viable and living documents.

Mr. President, I know that you agree with me that freedom is too precious a gift for our nations to reserve only for ourselves. We must stand ready to encourage others, all those who strive for freedom, reconciliation and the rights of all men, whether they are on the African continent or otherwise.

We are deeply grateful for Liberia's courage and wisdom, and I especially appreciate your very wise and personal counsel. Liberia can count on the United States to assist and support the Liberian people, just as the United States has always been able to rely on the Liberian people.

Mr. President, when your grandparents emigrated from the United States to Liberia just a few years ago, we lost two valuable American citizens, but Liberia gained a great President.

Now, may I ask all of you to join me in a tribute to the President of Liberia and Mrs. Tolbert, a heartfelt welcome to Washington, and to Liberia and to the United States of America. May they ever be firm and very fast friends inspired by a common vision of liberty.

PRESIDENT TOLBERT: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, friends:

On this, our first State visit to the United States, we are indeed overwhelmed with joy to be here with you and to enjoy at evening time the loveliness of a warm American fellowship.

We are deeply grateful, Mr. President, not only for this cordially exceptional White House hospitality, but also for your extraordinarily kind invitation to share in the joys of the American Bicentennial.

MORE

Indeed, we are imbued on this occasion with signal salutations for your astounding achievements and filled with great pride and expectations as you enter upon your third century of independence, a unique and unified people, strong and proud, and a haven of opportunity and liberty; a foremost nation of nations wherein the seeds can blossom and flower in the realization of their fullest potential.

The selection of dainties you have so graciously accorded us in this most impressive sitting can be likened, Mr. President, on a banquet of superb grandure. How be it, Mr. President, my actual indulgence and sincerity to express that my happiness is in part subdued as I reflect upon the violent oppression and continuing brutal repression and massacre of my brothers and sisters being all of the family of man in Zambabwe, Namibia and South Africa at this time.

Nevertheless, with emphasis, Mr. President, I confirm that we are thrilled to be in your midst as you joyfully celebrate two Centennials of distinction and extend profound congratulations to you and all the American people, not only for the historic triumphs of the past but also for the current validity of unrelenting devotion to those invincible and eternal truths which, alas, must elevate the family of man and of nations.

We are highly appreciative of the gracious opportunity earlier afforded us today in the Oval Office to consider with you some of the urgent priorities of our world and also the development in Liberia, and we are deeply grateful both for your understanding of the problems which we face and for the assurances you have given of continued aid and assistance in an ever-increasing manner.

This time the consideration is truly encouraging and can only be indicative of the special relations between our two countries, of which we can be justly proud. It is uplifting to all mankind when America champions the advent of the new order of economic equity and prosperity for all the nations of our one world.

It is indeed exhilarating to mankind when America successfully displays in space the limitless technological ingenuity and superiority of the human specie over the universe of nature. It indeed enobles the human family when America continues in her third century the exercise of a courageous leadership role in securing dignity and independence for the oppressed and repressed peoples across the globe, particularly at this time in Southern Africa, thus upholding her firm democratic traditions in the interest of world security and peace.

MORE

In this regard, Mr. President, I assure you that we are deeply heartened by the positive and meaningful initiatives and diplomatic interventions for peace that you and your Government are undertaking during this year of America's Bicentennial through Secretary of State Kissinger to end the most serious South African conflict which is indeed crucial to all Africa and must be of concern to the whole world.

I can only reiterate it is our ardent hope that America will continue among nations to build constructively upon its moral and its industrial stature.

The strength of Liberia's existence lies embedded in the unyielding and unconquerable spirit that has characterized America's history.

Having stood unswervingly and fearlessly for one century and three decades upon the same democratic ideals which led to the founding of the American nation, Liberia has steadfastly kept aloft the torch of liberty and democracy in Africa, presaging upon our continent the new age of total African emancipation.

We firmly hold those truths in sacred and pragmatic relevance to our victorious national design that our people under God should become more solidly interwoven and enterprising, more skillfully productive and prosperous.

Liberia has a rendezvous with development reconstruction. With increasing health programs and expanding educational facilities, Liberians are acting now to widen yet the vistas of opportunity for all of our people, with greater emphasis being placed on those within the distant rural areas of the country, and rightly so.

Through total civic involvement, through modern infrastructural improvement and rural integrated development, we are acting now to tighten still the treasured bonds of national unity. By means of the free enterprise system, by a policy of productive co-partnership with other nations and with our foreign investors, and by dedicated and responsible husbandry of all our resources, we are acting now to brighten yet the eager aspects for unprecedented national prosperity.

Liberians are actively aware that the spirit of America has a uniquely infectious quality. Thus, to an aspiring and emerging world, it is my conviction that this land and people must remain a towering pillar of strength, courage, enterprise and challenge, inspiring all nations.

MORE

To peoples struggling still under the yoke of violent oppression, America must continue to tend and fend and fan the flame of freedom, justice and human dignity. To nations entangled in the intricacies of economic exploitation, American ingenuity must set the pace in resolving the issues of global restructure and reform -- an excellent nation in command.

As she embarks upon another Centennial destiny -- and destinies still to follow -- America's challenge and promise must remain indeed commanding -- to signal the course of victory for an expanding and wholesome functioning world society.

In this enterprise of hope and action, Mr. President, we in Liberia -- as trusted friends, and will remain so -- can certainly pledge our sincere and solemn endeavor to dispel despair, to defeat dejection and, in an environment of mutual respect and reciprocal friendship, to join unremittingly with you in consolidating constructive cooperation and productive interdependence among all peoples and nations of our one world.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to stand. Raise your glasses with me as I proffer the health of the President of the great United States. To the peoples of the United States of America, our fondest hopes and best wishes for continuing dynamic and magnetic success.

The President.

END

(AT 10:42 P.M. EDT)