SPEECH DELIEVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR SHIFERAW TEKLEMARIAM AMBASSADOR, EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA DURING THE YALI AFRICA LAUNCH AND WOMEN IN AFRICAN POWER CERTIFICATE CEREMONY

Programme Director: Ms Christal Petersen

Professor Mandla Makhanya – Principal and Vice-Chancellor: University of South Africa

Ms Rebecca Krzywda - Deputy Mission Director: USAID, Southern Africa

Mr Richard Nelson - Deputy Coordinator: Power Africa

Dr. Shola Safo-Doudu – Chief of Party: YALI RLC-West Africa

University of South Africa staff

USAID Staff

Members of Diplomatic Missions represented in South Africa present

Young Women in African Power – Cohort 2 participants

Indeed, Africa carries the hope of the rest of the world. The light shines over our continent not only as a geographical phenomenon but as part of the design of our forebears who lived their lives under a shadow of colonial subjugation and dominance. It is in the turning-over of Africa’s plight that the brightness of the sun shining into an African hut through a half open door in the countryside brings hope for a new beginning. The half open door of doubt, uncertainty and fear will soon be wide open.

The half open door will be wide open to let more sun rays in. There is a new opportunity for Africa to let the sun rays in but also to open the door wider for the inhabitants of the hut to go and venture out. They should venture out as they also have something valuable to offer world. They offer the energy to the world which they generated during the overnight hibernation.

The sun shines on the countryside as it does in the buzzling urban areas of high and often insatiable appetite. Urban gluttony is unfortunately forced to share a meal with its cousin – called rural tranquillity. Urban gluttony needs consistent supply of produce from rural tranquillity. Rural tranquillity is now awake to the fact that unless it secures some of the produce for itself, urban gluttony will not share or leave anything for dinner.

The shine of urban migration has been dimmed by congestion and running grey water from burst pipes. The hopes of many wannabes hug in the fog of winter smoke hovering over the urban settlement. It is a cocktail for both urban fortune and missed opportunities, yet the resilience remains.

The demand for mutual co-existence extends beyond the complimenting energies of the rural and urban. Sustainable development thrives based on each geographical location using its unique offerings to contribute to the greater goal. The greater goal is human survival and prosperity for all.

The sun in the infinity range of its rays, indiscriminately gives hope to the downtrodden, poverty-stricken and the diseased as well as the healthy, wealthy and privileged. May the sun rays hit the surface of the earth not to scourge it but to provide the much-needed penicillin injection to strengthen the continent’s immune system against disease, famine and war.

The availability of energy sources is fortunately spread out through the continent to enable a balanced development agenda. Although there may be a concentration of one resource in one region than the other, each region is blessed with energy resources enough for that regions’ development. The resources we have in the continent should be used to fight disease, hunger and prevent war. These resources in their abundance are a blessing to us and should never become a curse, otherwise the struggles of our forebears would be in vain. We cannot afford that!

The heat of the sun is the same every day. How you experience that heat is based on your position on and the earth’s proximity to the sun. The further you are, the less the heat. However, the heat of the sun is consistent. It is in this consistency that we should all find energy and commitment to challenge the some of the tough problems faced by the African continent.

We need leadership which is just as consistent in its articulation of the vision as well as its application of principles. A lot of work has been done in the continent to ensure that we have sound governance structures for the consistent application of democratic governance principles. The need for new leadership offering new perspective in the application of governance principles cannot be over emphasised in a continent where the majority of the population comprises of young people under the age of 35.

Program Director allow me to challenge this cohort of young women leaders before us today to be as consistent as the sun when the take up leadership roles in the various spheres of society in their home countries. May I challenge the young women leaders before us today to indiscriminately offer their leadership to all members of their communities equally. May they be that shining light that bring hope to the rural tranquillity. May they help manage and feed the appetite of urban gluttony in a sustainably manner through the responsible exploitation of our natural resources. As you graduate today, Africa will look upon you to rise to the challenge and engage robustly in bringing much needed solutions of the problems confronting us.

The struggles of women across the world are well recorded. Women shared in the pain of slavery. Women shared in the pain of colonisation. Women continue in many parts of the continent to be denied education, work opportunities, access to power and many other. They are confined to child bearing and minding. The analogy of mutual coexistence between urban and rural can be extended to the need for mutual coexistence between the genders. For us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals after missing the targets set in Millennial Development Goals it is critical that all the talents available to the continent must be put to good use including the talent offered by women.

The effort by Power Africa to fund a women-only leadership development program is truly commendable. It is visionary. The positive impact of building leadership capacity in general and amongst women in particular sets the continent in a path for greater possibilities. The four weeks that you as young leaders have spent together in the program should have afforded you the opportunity to create strong bonds amongst yourselves. The bonds are social capital that you have created for yourselves through this unique opportunity. Trust me, one day you will need to cash-in on this social capital. As you go back to your communities tomorrow, you have no idea when you are likely to meet again and what the circumstances will be then. Maintain the bonds, keep them alive. Keep the energy displayed over the four weeks flowing.

Today, also marks the launch of YALI Africa. It is the collaboration of the four regional leadership centers to create one YALI for the continent. The work that YALI has done in the continent to bring young leaders together has been phenomenal. The ability to collaborate and work together across the continent really offers new hope for all of us. It demonstrates that with commitment and passion we can indeed as a collective achieve more. These efforts follow in the footsteps of Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Emperor Haile Selassie and many others who fought and worked tirelessly for the unity and prosperity of Africa as a continent in the founding of the Organisation for African Unity and now the African Union.

This continent should actively rely on women to bring peace and fight disease. I truly believe that these traits come naturally in women than men. With more women in leadership, an Africa free of war and disease should become a reality in our lifetime. We need to jealously defend the plight of the girl child. We have in many parts of the continent successfully managed the debilitating impact of tribalism and its threat to our national freedoms. We can similarly fight and win the war against gender-based discrimination by aggressively promoting the narrative of women talents and their contribution. It is not uncommon that when a family member falls ill it is women who will share the pain more than men. The inclusion of women in decision-making will bring more compassion in policy making and practice. There is indeed logic in the argument that if more women were in policy making structures, sanitary pads and not condoms would be free in most countries.

Programme Director may I take this time to address the concept of leadership. Leadership is beyond common sense. This is critical because we are confronted by complex challenges. Education is important as the basis for leadership, so that our leaders in the villages and everywhere are educated to understand and most importantly notice these complexities. It is dangerous to lead from a common-sense perspective and to be completely ignorant of the complexities of the challenges that confront our communities.

While the importance of education has been recognised by many as an essential ingredient for development, I would like to talk about another important issue we often fail to address. It is the issue of character and behaviour.

I want to say to this august occasion that it is possible to be an award-winning musician and remain humble. It is possible to be a celebrated athlete and remain humble. You can be the richest dollar billionaire in the African continent and remain humble. It is the same for leadership. You can rise to the highest office in the land and be humble. Behavioural scientists tell us that it is possible through self-awareness, mentorship and coaching to model your behaviour. It is important that as we upscale our efforts in providing young leaders opportunities such as YALI does we do not reproduce old traits and leaderships characters of arrogance and intransigence.

It is important that we build a layer of leadership that will readily compromise during tough negotiations and silence guns throughout the continent once and for all. We need leadership in the continent that is going to create political stability and lasting peace to enable long-term investments, food security and abundance for all. We need a leadership that is going to be able to put Africa on the global map as an equal partner not as a recipient of donations. We need a world of self-sufficient economies across the globe to end donor and recipient relationships between countries. We need young leaders who are going to reduce and end African debt.

We need young leaders who are going to end corruption. Often young people speak against corruption when they are outside the circle of power. As soon that assume leadership positions, they also become corrupt. So, it seems some people aspire to become leaders in order to get the opportunity to be corrupt. Never speak against corruption if you never had the opportunity to be corrupt and chose to remain clean. Those of us who have never had the opportunity to be corrupt are a potential risk. So, as we speak against corruption we should say, I want the opportunity to resist the temptation of corruption and I know that I will come out clean after the experience. We have as a continent as many pairs of hands as everyone else on the globe. We can and should be competitive.

I have used the imagery of the sun for my speech today. I think the sun fits the occasion today because I’m told most of you harness the sun rays to power your communities. In my next speech I will honour the wind, water and the other power resources we have. I promise. As we go back home, we should remember that our valleys, mountains, rivers and streams noticed our absence. As we return, the bush forests and open lands will await us with great expectations. May we not disappoint them.

I would like to congratulate the Young Women in African Power Cohort 2 graduates today. I would also like to congratulate the leadership of the 4 regional leadership centers in launching YALI Africa. I like to appreciate the generous contribution of USAID, the MasterCard Foundation as well as the institutions which host these leaderships centers.

As I conclude, to the YALI graduates of today and alumni; you are the young leaders that Africa has been waiting for. I hope you have been empowered to be able to navigate the tricky task of finding space and favour to influence policies and practices which remain the domain of the older generation. It takes special skills and approach to curve spaces for other young leaders to emerge. As you keep the networks alive, share insights on what approaches work to broaden the space for the voices of young people to come through.

Thank and good luck!