



Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit

AUGUST 3-4, 2021 | VIRTUAL

Leadership for the Future: Resilience and Inclusion

Plenary - Secretary Blinken Remarks Transcript

Speaker

- Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State

Session Transcript

Hello everyone.

I'm a huge admirer and supporter of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, so I'm delighted to have this chance to speak with you all, especially the 2021 cohort, who represent all 49 sub-Saharan African nations.

COVID-19 meant that this year's Fellowship had to be virtual. But you still made it great. You took full advantage of every learning and friendship opportunity.

We're proud and grateful to be part of your journeys. I remember when we launched the Mandela Washington Fellowship back in 2014. We were so excited about the program, because Africa's future rests in the hands of extraordinary young leaders across the continent, and because it's a huge privilege and opportunity to help these extraordinary young leaders achieve their dreams. With this year's cohort, there are now more than 5,000 young leaders across Africa who are Alumni of the program. And they're doing outstanding and inspiring work on critical issues – issues that are having an impact in the lives of so many of their fellow Africans, from promoting entrepreneurship and education, to supporting democratic reform and a strong civil society.

I had a fantastic conversation with Mandela [Washington] Fellowship Alumni on my recent virtual trip to Kenya and Nigeria. We talked about urgent issues like global health and the climate crisis. And I knew I was speaking with the future leaders of communities and countries.

I wish I could do a shout-out to all of this year's participants individually, but let me just mention a couple, because they represent the concrete and creative ways in which Fellows are working to make lasting change.

Juweria Ibrahim is a Civic Engagement Fellow at Appalachian State University. She created an organization that advocates for women's rights in Ethiopia with free mentorship and skills development programs for women.





And Amadou Jallow is a Public Management Fellow at UC Davis. He works for the Gambia Standards Bureau, and his goal is to create regulatory frameworks for clean energy technologies to promote more innovation and more jobs in that critical space. I also want to mention an [Alumnus] who's continued to work with the U.S. State Department since participating in the program: Kaveto Tjatjara. Kaveto is from Namibia. He was a 2018 Business Fellow at the University of Notre Dame. And with the help of a grant from the State Department's Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund, he's scaling up his waterless toilet business. Now he'll be able to provide sanitation to another 1,300 kids. Take inspiration from Kaveto and stay connected with us.

Think of this as more than just a six-week program. You've just begun to engage with this network, you've just begun to use the new tools you've acquired. This is the beginning of your journey as a Mandela Washington Fellow.

We're eager to see all that the future will bring, and how the seeds that we planted together will bloom. So let me give a huge thank you to everyone who makes this Fellowship possible, including our team here in Washington in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; our staff at embassies and consulates across Africa; our partners at IREX (the International Research & Exchanges Board), who administer the program; and the 26 colleges and universities across the United States who have hosted our young leaders for the past six weeks.

This program of course is named for Nelson Mandela. He once said that education is the most powerful tool that you can use to change the world. I hope this Fellowship has added to your education. I know that getting to know you has added to the education of your teachers, your advisors, your peers, and I believe with all my heart that with the deeper sense of connection and friendship that this Fellowship makes possible, our countries and our people will be able to do much more together to build a better future.

Thank you all very much. Congratulations.