

7 Remarks on Mrs. Nixon's Return From Africa.

January 9, 1972

Mr. Vice President, Congressman Ford, members of the Cabinet, and all of you who have been so very kind to come to the airport here today on this rainy night:

First, I want to thank you for wishing me a happy birthday, and I know that it was hard for you to come. But I think perhaps the best birthday present, and the greatest sacrifice, was made by Mrs. Nixon: She flew 4,000 miles for my birthday party tonight.

Now I am in a bit of an awkward position, because I have to welcome her back officially, and I also have to welcome her back personally. I asked our Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Mosbacher, how I should address her, and so he wrote me a memorandum. He said, "You could call her Mrs. Nixon, or you could call her Madam Ambassador." But I guess I will just call her "Pat." Welcome home, Pat. We are glad you are here.

Now, if I could just spend a moment to tell you how this trip came about, and why

I think the choice that was made was a good one. My very dear and old friend, President Tolbert of Liberia, wrote me a personal note inviting me to his inauguration. We have very much in common. We both served as Vice Presidents during the same period of time, and he became President of his country, as I have had the honor of becoming President of the United States. And he is the President of the oldest republic in Africa and, of course, the United States is the oldest republic in the American Continent.

So I wanted to go, but I could not because of some of the demands of the schedule here at that time. So I wrote him back a personal note and said that while I could not come, I would try to send a very good substitute. Now, since the trip began, I have been reading the newspapers and, Mr. Vice President, also watching television, and as I watched the television and read the newspapers, of the welcomes that Mrs. Nixon received in Liberia and Ghana

and Ivory Coast, I realized that the substitute was doing a much better job than the principal would have done.

I simply want to say that this trip meant a great deal to us, the fact that Mrs. Nixon could go there. We have some very special memories of Africa. As Vice President, in 1957 we attended the ceremonies in which the first of the new black African countries received its independence: Ghana. I have been back several times since then, but now, on this occasion, this opportunity to go to the inauguration of President Tolbert, and then to be received again in Ghana and then in Ivory Coast, what this trip really demonstrates is this:

We have a very good, friendly, government-to-government relationship with the countries of Africa. But we, in America, also have a very deep, personal interest in those countries, and by Mrs. Nixon going there, she was demonstrating what I know every person in this country would want to: that we have a feeling of friendship and affection for the millions of people that live in this very old continent, but with many new countries and with great, great hopes for the future. And for that reason, the trip was taken and, of course, I thought it was a success.

Now, I had a lot more written down, but anything I said about what Mrs. Nixon did on this trip, people would attribute to bias, and they would be right. Now I was trying to think of somebody who could speak in welcoming Mrs. Nixon and could appraise the trip in a very honest way. The Vice President always says just what he thinks. [Laughter] However, before giving him this microphone, I want to remind him: I have the last word, and so does Mrs. Nixon. [Laughter]

Mr. Vice President.

THE VICE PRESIDENT. *Mr. President, Mrs. Nixon:*

Mr. President, this is a wonderful way for us to assist you in celebrating your birthday and welcoming back our very gracious First Lady from this very effective and wonderful trip that she made to three African nations, a trip that took some 8 days, and which, Mr. President, we all followed with great interest, just as you did, via the newspapers and television.

Now, Mr. President, I am not sure I am fully qualified to speak frankly on this occasion, because I must admit to some bias myself where Mrs. Nixon is concerned. And I think most of the people in this country, and indeed, just about everyone that I have talked to in my trips wherever I go in the world, is aware of the fact that Mrs. Nixon has discharged her duties as America's First Lady with distinction and grace. And the welcome that was given her in the African nations that she visited, the warmth of that reception and her gracious and generous response to it, made all of us very proud of you, Mrs. Nixon.

I think that we can simply say that even though it is the President's birthday, we all are the recipients of a present by having you back among us tonight, and we hope that this will be not your sole exercise in foreign affairs, but this may be the beginning of other and more enjoyable and more fruitful enterprises that you may undertake. And who knows, the reason I say more enjoyable and more fruitful is simply because in recognition of the times as they exist today, women seem to be doing more things and perhaps someday you may visit these countries taking along

the President as simply ancillary baggage.
[Laughter]

We are glad to have you back.

THE FIRST LADY. Before my husband grabs the microphone, I do want to thank all of you for coming out to the airport and welcoming me home.

I really had a wonderful journey. The people in the three countries I visited—Liberia, Ghana, and Ivory Coast—could not have been more friendly or more gracious or more hospitable. In fact, their hospitality was boundless and they all sent greetings, the leaders and the people in all

walks of life, to you here in the United States.

They are proud of the partnership with the United States, and this partnership is built on equality, mutual respect, and friendship. I hope that it will always remain that way.

Thank you, again.

THE PRESIDENT. And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, all of our very good friends who have come out here today, and thank you, Madam Ambassador.

NOTE: The exchange of remarks began at 6:04 p.m. at Andrews Air Force Base, Md.