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The African President Center President-in-Residence inaugural lecture by His Excellency Rupiah B. Banda

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The African President Center
President-in-Residence Inaugural Lecture

by

His Excellency Rupiah B. Banda

Boston University

Trustees Ballroom

April 2, 2012

Ambassador Stith,

The Dean of Students

Distinguished invited guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to address you this evening. Let me begin by taking a moment to express my deep gratitude to Ambassador Stith, the African Presidential Center, and Boston University for having invited me to participate in this programme. On behalf of my wife and family, we are also grateful to The Center staff for all of their generous support in making our move to Boston as convenient and comfortable as possible. I'd also like to recognize Dr. Beverly Brown, a professor at the university; but also the first lady of this university. I met with President Robert Brown this morning; he was extremely gracious in welcoming me and my family to the university. Now let me focus on my remarks.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the reasons I am here is because I have gained notoriety, hopefully temporarily, *for having lost*, not won, my last election. That might make me Boston

University's *very first* President in Residence who appears before you as an example of *the other side of democracy* – what happens when this cherished system of rules produces different outcomes.

But I ask everyone here to take a moment to reflect: what does it mean that we are *so surprised* when an incumbent African president loses an election and hands over power to another party? Isn't it disappointing to see such low expectations for African democracy illustrated in such a manner? In a way, I am grateful to President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, who just stepped aside after being defeated at the ballot the box by Macky Sall, perhaps lifting the burden somewhat from my shoulders – though of course it is entirely a different question when a leader has been in power for more than a decade.

Many of the students here will undoubtedly be familiar with various academic definitions of democracy, but today, one that strikes me comes from a political scientist named Adam Przeworski, who once wrote the following: “Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections. There are parties: divisions of interest, values and opinions. There is competition, organized by rules. And there are periodic winners and losers.” In other words, when we talk about governance, we must also speak about the process of selecting the leadership, and the ongoing functioning of a fair system that continually reflects the desires and will of the citizens as a limitation on executive power. There are many things of which I'm proud during my time as President of Zambia. One of which is the process of my ceding from office. The process by which you leave is as important as that by which you come in. I'm proud that my administration left with dignity, affording my successor the opportunity to succeed or fail based on his policies not because of political traps laid by those he followed. Let me add that I made the transition from power complete. On my own accord, I even relinquished the leadership position of my

party. I did so because I believe past presidents must give future leadership an opportunity to emerge. For democracy to flourish there must be a continuing stream of individuals of integrity and ideas with promise. There must be room for a new generation of leaders to rise to solve the next generation of problems. If democracy is going to be secure in countries like Zambia, if development is going to take root; old leaders can't cling to power or attempt to consolidate it at all costs. There comes a time when leaders must step aside and become statesmen (elder or not) and stop seeing themselves as the personification of the state. Again, let me say that's why I applaud Wade's conceding power in Senegal.

Before I go further, while am proud of how I left office, let me state for the record that I am very proud of my achievements while in office. During my time as Zambia's president we grew the economy at over 7% a year, despite our beginning in the wallows of the 2008 global financial crisis, making us a unique star of Africa. We lifted thousands of people out of poverty, and created hundreds of thousands of private sector jobs, while focusing on critical social needs such as healthcare and education. I am also proud of my campaign last fall. In an election contested by three major parties and seven smaller parties, our party secured the votes of 35% of the country, and lost by a narrow margin of around 180,000 votes in a hard-fought contest. My goal from the beginning of my career in public service was to leave Zambia more united as nation and a better place to live than when I started, and it is my hope that history will show that we were successful. This was not a modest goal, and as I shall explain, achieving unity among all Zambians no matter what region or tribe they come from is decidedly more challenging than America's impressive patriotism.

And so today, I have the privilege of speaking before this distinguished forum to share some of these experiences, providing a personal perspective on issues of African democracy and

governance. In future lectures, we will expand our discussion to cover broader regional experiences, but today, I shall focus on what I know best: the political system of Zambia.

As you may be aware, I became the fourth elected President of the Republic of Zambia in October 2008, a landlocked country surrounded by eight neighbors in the center of southern Africa. Zambia covers about 752,618 kilometer squared, with a population of about 13 million people and home to a diverse 73 tribal groupings. Our Gross Domestic Product estimate hovers around 19.1 billion United States dollars, while GDP per capital is around 1,405 United State dollars, making Zambia a lower middle income country by World Bank standards.

Zambia fought for its independence from the British and it was granted on 24th October 1964, and as such, it will not be surprising that our governance structure closely follows the British Parliamentary model. In that regard, we have an Executive branch headed by an elected President, a parliament headed by a Speaker elected by MPs representing our diverse regions, and the Judiciary headed by an appointed Chief Justice.

All these structures are intended to operate on a principal of separation of powers and non-interference, particularly by the Executive in the running of the Judiciary and Legislature – and, as I shall explain later, it is how this separation of powers is managed that becomes very important in the consolidation of democracy in Africa.

As you may know, from 1973 to 1991, Zambia was not a pure democracy, but rather a democracy preceded by an adjective. When President Kenneth Kaunda issued a constitutional amendment known as the Chona Declaration in 1973, Zambia became technically known as a “One-Party Participatory Democracy.” The only party allowed to contest elections was the United National Independence Party (UNIP).

When I was a young diplomat, serving in postings to Washington DC and to the United Nations in New York, I was a member of UNIP along with the majority of Zambia's future leadership – including the current President Michael Sata. As the country's economic and political situation deteriorated from the mid 1970s through the late 1980s, pressure to return to multiparty politics by the nascent Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), which opposed the one-party state of UNIP was heightened.

By 1991 the opposition MMD achieved its goal of returning Zambia to a competitive, multi-party democratic system, when President Frederick Chiluba defeated Kaunda in a landslide election victory. Our experience with this historic transfer of power from UNIP to the MMD after 27 years under one party, was based on the resounding popular will of the people, as citizens became disillusioned with the government's failure to meet expectations. It was this experience that earned Zambia its credentials as a country that truly champions competitive democracy, and enshrines these values in its constitution. Chiluba served two terms, spanning 10 years.

Levy Mwanawasa was elected as president in 2001, who would later extend an invitation to me, to serve as his Vice President in 2006.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I now reflect on my Presidency and on democratic governance in Zambia, from the moment I stood for the Presidency, I understood the challenges our country faced. This was reflected in my inaugural address to Parliament on November 2, 2008. I pledged to be a president for all Zambians, to deliver economic prosperity, to deliver good governance, and to continue the fight against poverty and corruption, to ensure the country was able to feed itself and not rely on hand outs.

I also understood that to sustain growth and prosperity the country needed to be unified, uphold democratic governance and the right of the people to elect their leaders freely and fairly. I reflected on the need to educate our nation and to ensure our young generation had life sustaining skills through strong economic growth and to have a healthy nation. I believed that this in turn would provide the necessary economic opportunities to our citizenry.

Political leaders have a responsibility to listen to their people, not their own egos. The people of Zambia have basic needs – to put food on the table, to have the opportunity to find work, and to be granted the dignity to be able to select and hold accountable their political leaders. These goals cannot be met without a fair system and strong economic growth, and my government was faced with accomplishing this task in the face of the worst global economic recession in recent history.

So the question is; how we were able to grow the economy in these conditions? As a small economy, we could not stop the recession, but we could prepare for when it would end. I convened a special committee of our top economic minds to plan and prepare our nation for the end of the recession, to ensure that we saved as many jobs as possible, had sufficient food supply, and set the stage for economic diversification away from the copper sector through improving of our infrastructure.

We worked to provide support to the key sectors of the economy such as agriculture, energy, health, education, tourism and manufacturing. This was a huge challenge, but we did score some exemplary successes in those areas. We sought to take advantage of Zambia's geopolitical position as a natural trade hub by building and repairing thousands of kilometers of roads. We made a dedicated investment to improve facilities at schools, health centers and

hospitals, and even introduced mobile hospitals on a large scale to deliver quality health care to remotest parts of our vast country. As a government we were eager to deliver results to our people.

For the agriculture sector, which makes up about 21.5 per cent of GDP, we continued to provide support in kind to the small and vulnerable farmers to obtain better planning and efficient operations. As result the country experienced three consecutive bumper harvests. This contributed significantly to our strong Gross Domestic Growth.

The industrial sector, in particular mining, received our close attention. During the crisis, when several major mines gave indications they were due to close, my administration personally intervened, and the government stood ready to take over any such mine. In fact one mining company did close and we took on ownership of that mine and immediately found investors who were ready to keep it operating. By doing this we were able to save thousands of jobs in Zambia whilst mines in other countries around the world continued to shut down operations and shed jobs. To boost manufacturing, we introduced multi facility economic zones to encourage value addition to the abundant raw materials produced in Zambia, such as, copper, the many minerals and agricultural produce.

Another major focus for our recovery strategy during the crisis was boosting the tourism industry, by building infrastructure such as airports and hotels and reduced visa fees. This successfully enabled us to tap into South Africa's hosting of the World Cup in 2010, producing record growth in the number of visitors who came to enjoy Zambia's famous natural beauty.

But what I am most proud of during my presidency is less visible. It was our administration's steadfast refusal to allow the executive branch to encroach on other branches of

government, to stand by the principles of democracy that had been damaged in the past. This led to a spirited competitive environment, sometimes to the detriment of my administration, but fully within the boundaries of what we should expect in a normal democracy.

There were also deep misunderstandings fueled by hostile newspaper editors who chose to back the opposition party. In particular, my government was criticized over a Zambian court decision regarding the former President Frederick Chiluba, who had been found guilty of corruption in a civil case by the London High Court. Essentially, I was being demanded as president to personally intervene in the judicial process and violate the separation of powers to force the judiciary to uphold the British decision against Chiluba, who, it must be recognized, was seen as enormously popular leader by a large number of people in the country. Notwithstanding that Chiluba once jailed me as a political prisoner; my administration chose to uphold the constitution and allow the legal system to exercise its authority without executive intervention.

When my presidency began, we made the fight against corruption a priority, and sought to base these anti-corruption efforts under a sound statutory framework that would conduct prosecutions in a lawful manner. One of the most important measures we took was to streamline the prosecutorial bodies, by moving the Anti-Corruption Task Force under the police to improve its efficiency, deepen access to resources, and cut back on all the redundancies.

If there is one thing that I regret during my presidency, it is that our communications efforts regarding these decisions could have been much better. The move of the Task Force to serve under the police, which, by the way, was essential to the improvement of the anti-corruption drive. There were three reasons why we moved the task force under the police: 1) to

avoid the spiraling costs, 2) to restore presumption of innocence and due process, and 3) to protect against personal and political manipulation.

When the task force functioned independently, investigators were enormously wasteful of the budget, scheduling expensive and unnecessary trips to Europe and the United States, and then coming up with very weak cases – often accusing some corrupt individual of a fraud in the amount that represented less than *one tenth* of the budget wasted by the task force in bringing the case to trial. Further, before my reforms, the task force operated on the principle of “guilty until proven innocent,” and were notoriously famous for using the press to conduct trials by headline – sometimes even resulting in newspaper editorials, not real investigation and evidence, being presented to the judge. Lastly, having the task force separate from the police opened it up to personal and political manipulation, with the appointment of members of the ruling party to key positions to guide prosecutions.

I continue to believe that our cooperating partners (donor community) were critical of our anti-corruption efforts because we failed to communicate all these concerns, and that there was a failure on behalf of the West to understand how an “anti-corruption fight” can become corrupted itself.

One of the main reasons Zambia has continued to experience these challenges, despite our reasonably strong democracy and growing economy, was that we still had a fragile institutional and legal framework. For instance, the constitutional review process, undertaken by a special commission formed by a Parliamentary Act, has been going on since August 2007. The past two elections were held with all the political parties raising constitutional issues relating

to the fairness of the election. Nonetheless the last two elections, which were judged as free and fair by all international observers, were upheld and the results accepted.

Zambians are still struggling to have a popularly driven constitution to guarantee the people's rights and to protect this fragile democracy from the abuses of its rules. For a growing democracy, to have an acceptable constitution that meets the approval of the majority of the people of a country is important. Therefore, I see the entrenchment of democracy in Zambia happening once we have a people driven constitution that is not subject to manipulation year after year. For instance, on repeated occasions the people of Zambia have voiced their support to change our electoral system to election by majority – known as “50 PLUS 1.” Currently, the president becomes elected on a “first past the post,” format, which means that we do not have runoff elections, despite often having three or more parties winning more than 10%. These are issues that need to be resolved under the current constitutional review process.

Notwithstanding the continuing work on our constitution, our government during my stewardship continued to strengthen institutions to underpin the country's governance system, such as, the anti-corruption commission, the office of the auditor general, the police service, the electoral commission, parliamentary office in the constituencies and so on.

As a relatively small nation on the global stage, Zambia remains dependent on foreign investment and relations with both trade partners and donor countries. As such, the rise of China's presence in Africa, and the management of these East-West tensions, became an important issue for our government.

When we were facing the challenge of financing, constructing and rehabilitating our infrastructure in the various sectors, it became clear that we needed to seek financing quickly,

and could not delay our plans to develop the country. The rise of new financial powerhouses in Asia, as you all know, is producing a geopolitical shift, and Africa is far from the only place where these new lenders and investors are going. Even Europe these days is propped up from Indian, Malaysian, and Chinese finance – so it is far from unique that Zambia experienced diversification. In some cases, we had successful partnerships with the West, including the U.S. government and U.S. companies. However, in other cases, increasingly, our needs were matched by the Chinese. They offered the financing we needed and the technical knowhow, and so it followed that we should negotiate with them on certain projects.

This did not always sit well with our cooperating partners from the West, who, discomfited by the new Eastern presence in Africa, would make unfounded allegations of impropriety and unreasonable demands to know the details of loan conditions and pricing of competitive bids, which were not only false and damaging to us, but also to the welfare of our people. For as much as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union played out in various struggles for influence among African countries, often damaging the region's democratic development, there is a new economic struggle for influence between the East and West that touches not just Zambia, but many young democracies of Africa.

It is my hope that any disputes arising out of Eastern investment in Africa can be successfully managed in a collaborative manner, and that decision makers in the West adopt a more long-term vision of these emerging relationships, rather than the myopia that has characterized some of the more regrettable exchanges among our countries. There is this proverbial saying that describes this, that "*when two elephant fight, the grass suffers*" and we have suffered. A good partner does not seek to limit the choices of the other – instead a good partner mutually benefits from the success of the other.

What I've just summarized is my record of accomplishments and the geopolitical environment in which I tried to meet the challenges I faced. As I said, I'm proud of what we did. So, I must admit I was surprised - that even in a crowded field of opponents - we did not receive a popular mandate to build on our successes. While we didn't work miracles with the economy; we did work wonders. Again, 7% growth during a world-wide recession is pretty good by any measure; if President Obama had my numbers I don't think he'd be worried about reelection in November.

While strong economic indicators are important, as I am sure you have studied here in this prestigious institution, it's not just the statistics but the perceived state of things on the ground that ultimately matters more. From as much economic growth was generated under three different MMD presidencies, it became apparent that the expectations of our young population to share in this growth had not yet been met. In fact, I recently discussed this with Ambassador Stith in some detail over dinner a few days ago and read his article in African Business on "How to contain spontaneous social combustions" - - and I couldn't agree more with him.

Zambia is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa and also features a very young population. About 38 percent or more of our population live in urban areas and the median age is about 17 years. As the economy has grown our people, particularly those in these urban areas and the youths, have become increasingly disillusioned and have been looking for an answer to why there are no jobs for them, why there are no opportunities for them to earn a decent living. This leaves young democracies vulnerable even though progress is being made through a democratic process, the real question remains unresolved. JOBS!

These young people are left unemployed, hungry and angry, and open to radical ideas, which can destabilize any country whether it is a functioning democracy or not. When you have sharp inequality, democracy becomes threatened because certain parties are able to seize political power by promising impossible redistributive policies – in other words, populism – which also carries with it 1) dangerous tones of nationalism, 2) initiatives for expropriations which scare away foreign investment, and 3) a highly politicized treatment of the judiciary.

The kind of transformation my government was working towards does not happen overnight – it takes years of hard work to incorporate everyone into the economy, and, despite recognizing this process, I can fully appreciate the impatience that many Zambians felt to be included in the growth. This means that even when the economy has emerged from negative growth, and all the macroeconomic indicators have shown positive performance, this has not translated into real change in the lives of many of our young people.

That is where the role of the regional and international community comes in to support the development of democracy in Africa. I recently served as the leader of an observer mission on behalf of the Carter Center to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I saw firsthand the important influence international organizations can have in assisting fragile systems.

There is also a growing responsibility on behalf of multilateral regional institutions to take part in upholding democracy in member countries. When I served as Chairman of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation of the Southern Africa Development Community, we convened a special meeting of all political parties in Madagascar at the SADC secretariat in Gaborone, where we were successful in outlining a proposed road map for the peace process in Madagascar. This type of support, be it regional, multilateral, or international,

is critical for the success of democracy in Africa, and must be aimed at upholding the rules of the system rather than the endorsement of selected candidates. These types of organizations and programs require funding, support, and political will. It is my hope that the students in this audience today, as the next generation of leaders, will encourage your governments to support the efforts of Africans to raise the profile of democratic development in Africa.

We have in the recent times observed developed countries intervening directly to support the will of the people; the most recent example being the “Arab Spring”. It is obviously hard to ignore, and we shouldn’t ignore, the cries of people yearning to be free. Having said that, it is important to understand the implications of such interventions. Sometimes there are unintended consequences. When NATO made the decision to intervene in Libya, thousands of Turag mercenaries in Khadfy’s employ fled after his fall. Heavily armed, they went into Mali in waves causing the instability we are witnessing in Mali right now. This is clearly a case where intervention to remove a dictator and promote democracy in one country has had an undesirable outcome in another country.

From my experience as the President of Zambia, what I can tell you is that democracy and good governance is a never ending job – it is not something that is accomplished and then just left to stand alone – it must always be strengthened, respected, and upheld. Democracy also requires a culture of acceptance, the people of the country must understand that even when their candidate loses and the other candidate wins, it is still their government. That is why the expectations of the people need to be managed in African democracies, requiring that leaders be honest and transparent with their citizens.

Despite the challenges that yet remain I think my continent is getting there. As you say in the West, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. We’re building democracies on the continent, it is Africa’s day. Despite setbacks like Mali, we will continue to move forward. As noted in the African Presidential Center’s Fact Sheet on Democracy in Africa, ten years ago there were 11 democratically retired African heads of state, today there are 33! With the help of friends like the United States, the energy and encouragement of the next generation of leaders symbolized by the students in this room, Africa’s future is full of promise and our young people, like yours, will have cause to dream. Thank you.