

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4904

February 4, 2008

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I was pleased to learn of your upcoming trip to the African countries of Benin, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, and Liberia and am writing to encourage you to use this opportunity to emphasize the importance of continued democratic reform, respect for human rights and rule of law, and peaceful conflict resolution in these countries and across the continent.

The current political and humanitarian crisis in Kenya is a vivid reminder of the need for political reform to ensure Africans are able to obtain the democracy they demand. More than simply rhetoric about the importance of free and fair elections, the time has come to consolidate the legal and institutional frameworks, to ensure equal and transparent competition for political positions, ensure accountability of officeholders, guarantee freedom of the press, and provide sufficient protections for civil society. The United States has an important role to play, diplomatically and through financial and technical assistance in building this long-term capacity. Rather than supporting individual leaders, I urge you reiterate America's commitment to investing in the institutions that will outlast any particular politician.

Of equal importance is genuine respect for human rights and the rule of law. Although the emergence of more numerous and active civil society organizations is encouraging, many of these advocates continue to face persecution from government and police. The United States must condemn such politically-motivated detentions and arrests, and call for the full prosecution of those found guilty of human rights abuses. The persistence of impunity, particularly for those in power, undermines efforts to improve fiscal transparency and can be especially destructive in the context of countries grappling with abundant natural resource. African leaders recognize that the abuse of political positions is simply unacceptable and has serious domestic and international consequences.

As you know, despite the great promise of the people and countries of Africa, much of this potential has been delayed or even destroyed by conflict. Rwanda and Liberia still suffer deep social and economic scars from their recent pasts, and fighting continues to cause death and displacement in Chad, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of

Congo, Uganda, and elsewhere on the continent. While building our ability to prevent conflict in Africa remains critical, the international community still has a vital role to play in helping warring parties achieve negotiated settlements and then helping to rebuild shattered societies so that stability and prosperity can resume.

Your visit to Africa comes at an important time in the history of the United States' relations with this increasingly-strategic part of the world. Unburdened by a colonial legacy and bolstered by the success of programs initiated by your administration to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria, promote economic development and poverty-reduction, and provide humanitarian assistance for those suffering natural or man-made disasters, the United States is well-positioned to help African countries overcome the numerous challenges impeding the full achievement of their potential. By helping these countries develop the institutions, infrastructure, and policies that create political space for debate and discussion, provide fundamental protections and services, and consolidate stability, we will be building strong partners who develop and support mutual international objectives.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak about this issues in greater depth prior to, or after, your trip. Regardless, I wish you and Mrs. Bush a pleasant and productive visit to Africa.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold  
United States Senator