**Why the African diaspora is crucial to the continent's future**

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So, I'm here to recruit you. But not in the sense that you're thinking. I know I'm a politician. I'll save that for another day. I'm here to try and encourage you to take up a leadership role in public service in your country and on your continent. I'm here to convince you that your country and your continent need you - not later, not when you're older and more experienced, but now - and that whether you realize it or not, your country's politics are going to be doomed to fail unless you're willing to get involved right now. So my recruitment pitch comes with a single disclaimer: I resigned from public office 18 months ago. I did it in order to take stock of my time in office, to think about the work that I had done, to capacitate myself with skills, knowledge, contacts, allies and experiences, and to find a little bit of personal and professional perspective. It's one of the best decisions I think I've ever made. I imagine that some time during the next 18 minutes while I'm pitching you, you're going to think, "Yeah, it's easy for you to say I should go into public service. You've already done it and you've left. " But I hope I'll be able to convince you that, in fact, we all find ourselves in exactly the same boat right now. Because being outside of politics for 18 months has reminded me just how important it is and just how much the political landscapes in my country and in your countries and on our continent are truly lacking in good leadership and political talent. So, I want to make a deal with you. I'm not going to return to active politics unless you come with me. I'm not going to do it alone. I won't go back unless I can convince smart, entrepreneurial, highly skilled, talented, experienced young Africans like yourselves and millions more like you across the continent, that the best chance that our countries have, not just for survival but for lasting prosperity, is if our most talented citizens step forward and make themselves available, either for political party, leadership or for public service and government. So over the next 16-or-so minutes that are remaining, I'm going to alternately flatter you, as I just have, I'm going to challenge you, I'm going to talk to you about my experiences, about a couple of facts and figures; I may even frighten you a little bit. And it'll be entirely worth it if that fear convinces you of the urgency of the point in history that we find ourselves in today. Everything I say today will be in service of a single objective: convincing you, showing you, that your countries need you; that Africa's prosperity may depend on many things - entrepreneurialism, industrial development, health reform, social upliftment - but that all of these hinge upon the success of politics and government in our countries. I can't begin a talk about public service, of course, without honoring my former president Nelson Mandela, the father of democratic South Africa. President Mandela passed away on this day in 2013. I really believe that when the people of my country look back on the day that he passed away, it'll be seen as an inflection point in South Africa's history. The day we decided whether we could, indeed, go it alone without him. What's written in those history books will depend entirely on whether this generation, which includes all of you sitting in this room, recognizes that the time has come for us to take up the work that President Mandela left for us, before that work is captured by people who would use power and politics for empty vanity and personal gain. I'm referring, of course, to the young man who was here in London this very past week. Defiling the name of the visionary leader, the intellectual and political strategist, the formidable athlete, the Prince of the Abathembu nation who served as a South Africa's first democratic president. The young man who tried to taint President Mandela's legacy with a few throwaway lines, all in service of getting cheap headlines, which he got. People like this, who we leave public service to when we stay out of the fray of public service, are the reason your country and my country needs you and needs us. So let us begin. I want to first talk to you about the African diaspora. You may have heard about a study in 2013 that revealed that cash transfers from Africans living outside of the continent have now begun to exceed donor aid from foreign countries into Africa. In 2012, total remittances to Africa stood at 60 billion dollars while in the same year, official development aid to Sub-Saharan Africa totalled 44. 6 billion by comparison. Now, this got me thinking. If we can do such great work with our money from outside of Africa, what can we do with our skills, our talent, our experiences, our education and our passion for our countries and for our continent? I've spent the past semester at the Harvard Kennedy School as a fellow at the Institute of Politics. I ran a seminar which was called "How to build a democracy? Lessons from South Africa. " It was also about Zimbabwe and Malawi. And it wasn't intended to make it seem like we got everything right in South Africa, but it was asking the critical question: Now that we have this legacy of peaceful transition, of constitutionalism, of difficult negotiations, which were very, very difficultly gotten, are we going to be successful in entrenching that democracy and making it last into the future? Now, one of the benefits of being an African in an academic setting like New England is that other African students reach out to you, they want to talk to you, and many of them express to you their desire to enter public service. So I had students knocking down my door, wanting to talk to me in office hours about the fact that they have Ghanean parents but they were born in Texas. They really wanted to give back to Ghana, but they're afraid that if they go home, nobody will take them seriously as real Africans. I had students who said they had families, wives, children, husbands, partners to take care of, perhaps they were better off staying in the United States and providing for their families back home rather than going back and getting into public service. This got me thinking about the question of skills remittance, of talent remittance, of social and political remittance. If these young people have the passion to give back to their communities monetarily, imagine how different our politics would be if those same skills, influence, leadership, talentwere put at work in service of the public good. And that includes all of you in this room because many of you are also part of the diaspora. I'm here to recruit you. I'm here to make a deal with you. I'm not going back unless I take you with me. (Laugther)Now, I know that most of you, if not the vast majority of you, are completely fed up, turned off, discouraged, disgusted by politics, either in your country, in this country, all over the world. Perhaps you are discouraged by the fact that governments are slow to deliver. Perhaps they're inefficient. Perhaps they are thoroughly corrupt and rotten to the core. Perhaps they're responsible for conflicts that have claimed lives and livelihoods in the countries from which you come. So why would you sink your time and your energies into such a compromised system? One of the most powerful analyses of conflict, inefficiency, corruption, stagnation which I've encountered in recent months is the question of a political economy. There is a reason that our governments are not performing as they should. It's not just because of a failure within the system. Consider the political economy of conflict and corruption in your own country. Why is it so difficult to overcome? Who is making money or amassing power because things don't work the way they should? Where does the back stop? Who has an incentive to keep the system dysfunctional? And how can we work together to overcome their total infection of the system, to ensure that we don't lose our grip on the very principle of democratic governance? The answer, I'm afraid, because you were born into this political time, is simply by taking over - you have to get involved. There's no way around it. You have to join political organizations in numbers large enough to influence change from within. You have to actively seek to take up a leadership role in government, in the state, in the public service and deftly but decisively move its priorities to where they should be: not in the service of people who want to amass power and money for themselves, but to better the lives of the highest number of people. There will always be government, whether we like it or not, whether we find it palatable or not. But there won't always be democracy. If we ignore politics, the people who have been quietly lobbying our governments to prioritize development ahead of democracy, these are the people who will have their way, and the systems that we now take for granted will dissolve before our eyes. When I was campaigning in South Africa last year for the 2014 general election, the voter registration numbers looked a little bit like this, six months before the election: 23% of potential voters in the 18-to-19-year-old age group were registered to vote. In the age group 20 to 29 years old, 55% were registered. And from 30 upwards, the number varied from 79 to 100%; in fact, there were more people aged 80 and over who were registered than were in the census numbers in South Africa. Imagine that. Fully 100% of people over a certain age consider voting to be an indispensable right, 21 years into democracy, and do not shirk their responsibility to register and turn out at the polls. But in the 18-to-19-year-old age group - and we must remember 19 is the average age on our continent; 26 is the average age in South Africa - the number is 23% to 55%. What's the political economy of voter apathy? Who benefits when we stay out of the system? Who gets to keep the status quo and empower themselves and enrich themselves and continue to infect our political system like a cancer. Who banks by us continuing with the status quo? Now even as I say all of this to you, that your country and your continent need you to enter public service, I know that if you take up my challenge, you're going to face huge amounts of resistance - all because of these political economies that I have just described. I did. I was told that I was too young. I was too female. I didn't have enough experience though no one could define what experience was enough. I had too much of a white accent; I wasn't a real African. I straightened my hair and wore weaves; I wasn't a real African. We should be honest about the things that hold people back from entering public service - humiliation, degradation; it's not an easy road - but all of these things should illustrate to you the extent to which the status quo is designed to enrich and empower a few at the expense of the many, and it should impart to you the urgency of you, as a generation, of now getting involved in public service to change that very culture. And if you decide to enter public service, you may even be tempted to believe some of these criticisms. They're designed to keep you out; that's how gatekeeping works. Somebody is benefitingfrom the absence of excellence and disruption in politics and government. But these are challenges that have to be faced on. There is no other route; there is no wishing this away. They are the reason that your country and your continent need you. We have this thing in politics in Africa; it's called the "big man. " The cult of personality - we've all heard different terminologies for it. In South Africa, in particular, this entails waiting for a great person to come and save us from ourselves. Currently, we're waiting for Cyril Ramaphosa or Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma or [inaudible] to come and save South Africa from itself, to save us from the mess that we find ourselves in that perhaps another big man put us in. But how can a single personality be held responsible for building or for running a whole nation? And where do we turn when they fail? If we haven't cultivated any kind of pipeline of energetic, young people who wanted to enter public service now or in the future and, critically, who can do the job better, are we doomed to always have to choose between mediocrity and ego, and mediocrity and ego? Is that it? Is that all our government will ever be? Or worse: Are we going to stand by while presidents change constitutions so they can serve a third term and a fourth term and a fifth term, claiming that three million people signed a petition stating that they are the only person who can do the job? Is that what we'll do? Now, there's a new energy around entrepreneurism and innovation and growth in Africa today. But that energy isn't going to translate into lasting prosperity unless we get our politics right. Political leaders who are gatekeepers of the status quo will claim that any success is their success. They'll centralize power, and they'll demand that we all be grateful for those little green shoots of achievement, and then they'll claim that nobody else can do the job. They'll argue that development must come first, freedom can come later, and that they are the best benevolent dictator to do the job. They'll take your political voice from you when times are a little bit good, and when times go bad, they will refuse to give it back. There is no prosperity for our continent without a vibrant, diverse, and truly competitive politics, founded upon excellence, transparency and commitment to the public good. Our politics will not have any of these qualities unless talented, young people, the best people, step forward at this moment in Africa's history, when we're emerging from that stereotype of the dark continent, the hopeless continent, and commit themselves to public service. We must run for office. We must work in the civil service. We must disrupt the political status quo. We must prevent the rush to the bottom. You really are the ones that you have been waiting for. There are no great saviors waiting somewhere in the wings to save us from future problems. There's nobody who is waiting in the wings to come and save us from ourselves; there's just us. And I'm not going back without you. So, will you take up the challenge? Thank you.