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A deal-maker president and the “deal of the century.”

The flight from London Heathrow to Washington Dulles International Airport was uneventful, as were the immigration checks.

We travelled by taxi to our hotel, a budget hotel about half an hour’s drive from the airport.

After dinner, we rehearsed for our meeting at the White House. That President Trump, despite his busy schedule, had agreed to meet us was in itself a cause for optimism.

What were we to expect? His usual frank talk? Was he going to say something controversial, something that would cause irritation not only at home but also abroad?

We agreed to stick to our usual plan and leave Douglas to speak on our behalf, unless the president put a question directly to any of us.

Early the next morning we took a taxi and headed for the White House. The taxi driver told us he had driven passengers to the location so many times he did not need to feed the address, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, into his GPS.

“I can drive you there with my eyes closed”, he said, smiling.

“I am a little over 50. I started driving a taxi in the Washington area when I was around 20. I think it was towards the end of the Reagan presidency. Then came Bush senior, to be followed by Clinton, then Bush junior, followed by Obama... now, hey, Trump! Eh, President Trump! My friends. I better keep quiet!”

Without revealing we were on our way to see him, Douglas inquired: “How do you find him?”

“I am not interested in politics; I only wish that someone would close his Twitter account!”

“But you cannot do that! It will amount to a breach of his human rights!”

“Okay, then they had better employ someone to play the role of a filter for him – just exactly what you do when you pour your dirty water on a paper filter to remove the dirty stuff, don’t you? In the same way they should pay someone to filter out all the unwanted stuff from his tweets! I am a taxi driver, a common man on the street as it were. I can say something insulting, people may not like it, but they won’t put so much weight on it. Not so the president. His words carry weight.

“Anyway, friends, let’s talk of something else. The weather for example; it promises to be a sunny day today.”

“I have been pleasantly surprised by the weather.”

“Why so?”

“We are from Africa. We arrived here not long ago. We hear at home your weather is very bad, so that was what we were expecting. Since our arrival, however, we have had nothing but good weather!”

“Friends, you have come at the right time. You better not venture here in winter, between December and February. It can indeed be very cold here; not only that, there can be terrible snow.”

“I wish I could experience snow!” Adwoa joined in.

“Well, then come here in winter; but be sure you come with very warm clothing, not the type you are wearing now.”

After about half an hour’s drive, our chatty driver dropped us at a spot several metres away from the gate of the White House. After going through extensive security checks, we were asked to wait in a reception area.

After waiting for about 10 minutes, a lady wearing a chic red dress and high-heeled shoes, which produced an audible *clickclack* sound as she walked, entered the room.

“Visitors from Mpintiiimiipiii?”

“Yes please.”

“Your IDs please.”

We produced our identification papers as required.

“Please follow me”, she said after cross-checking our passport details with a sheet of paper she held in her hands.

Accompanied by the lady who, according to information we later received, was a secret service agent, we were ushered into the Oval Office. Seated behind a huge wooden table adorned with the US flag was President Trump himself. I would have recognised him anywhere, even on the street without any introduction.

Unlike our meetings with European leaders, he remained in his seat until we approached his desk. He then got up, shook our hands and asked us to take our seats.

We had barely settled in our seats when he turned his attention to Adwoa and began:

“What happened to you, Ma’am?”

“Sir. I do not actually have a recollection because it happened at a tender age. My parents tell me I fell sick and they had no money to take me to hospital; then someone came to the village who attended to me, who gave me an injection; shortly thereafter I was unable to move the affected leg. That has been my lot ever since.”

“That is terrible; very horrifying. Did you receive any compensation?”

“Nothing; sir – not even money to take me to hospital.”

“That is bad, really bad. It is a really cruel world. Bad things happen to good people.”

A short silence followed, broken by the president.

“Now folks, let’s get to business. I have been briefed by my aides about your coming. I know it is about deprivation, hunger, poverty and similar stuff. I want however to hear the matter from the horse’s own mouth. So, what has brought you all the way from Guyana to the White House. “

“Just a point of correction, Mr President. We are from Ghana and not Guyana.”

“Oh boy, the Donald has again confused matters! I really thought I was receiving visitors from Guyana!”

“Mr President”, Douglas began, “Guyana is in South America, located between Venezuela and Surinam. Their capital is Georgetown. We on the other hand are from Ghana in Africa. It used to be known as the Gold Coast. The name was changed to Ghana after it gained independence from the British in 1957.”

“The Brits were at your place as well?”

“Yes sir.”

“The Brits, they were everywhere! Well, in effect, I am also partially British. My mother was Scottish; she moved to the US almost a century ago. But it wasn’t the Scots who went about colonising others. They went out as missionaries. It was rather the English who set up colonies.”

If he expected any of us to react to that, he might have been disappointed, for none of us reacted to his remarks.

“Okay, folks, what can I do for you?” he resumed after the short break.

“Mr President, we live in a little village in Ghana. Life is very harsh there. We have waited over the years for our government to help us – to no avail. We have therefore taken upon ourselves a mission to bring our plight to the attention of influential leaders like yourself.

“We want you to use the influence of the US in the United Nations, to put the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that we, the poor of Mpintimpi and elsewhere in the world, are provided with the basic daily needs required for human existence – a daily supply of food and water, decent accommodation, basic health care, basic education, etc.”

“Wait a minute”, the president interjected. “Before I respond to your call for a minimum income or benefit payment – did I get you right at the beginning that your country used to be called the Gold Coast?”

“Yes, Mr President; that is the name bestowed on it by the Europeans.”

“My guess is that your land abounds in gold; otherwise the idea would not have occurred to the Europeans to bestow that name on the country, would they?”

“Mr President, you are right. There is still quite a good deal of gold mining taking place there.”

“If that is the case, why have you travelled all the way to the US to seek help? Citizens of a country abounding in gold coming to beg the US for help? Good Lord, please restrain the mouth

of the Donald so he doesn't say anything that will be considered disparaging or derogatory by his nice visitors from Ghana!"

"Mr President, our country is indeed blessed with various minerals – gold, diamonds, bauxite, manganese. To top it all, in 2010 substantial finds of oil were discovered. Unfortunately, common residents like ourselves never benefit from such resources."

"That is bad; really grim. Your leaders need frank talk; real frank chatting. They cannot dwell in luxurious villas and drive expensive cars and leave the rest of the populace to dwell in absolute misery."

"Mr President, can you please do us a favour?"

"Don't mention money! The Donald does not dish out cash – hard-earned cash for no reason. He is not a charity!"

"Please keep your money, Mr President. What I am requesting from you is simply to tell this fact to the face of each African president you meet in future, telling them to take care of their citizens and not leave them alone to wallow in abject poverty."

"Of course, I will do exactly that. As you already hinted, I believe in frank talk. If I don't like you, I say it to your face! I don't wait until you are away before passing derogatory comments behind your back. I am not like Obama! You surely have heard about Obama, haven't you?"

"I have, Mr President."

"You may recall that early in his presidency he travelled to Ghana – have I said it right? – and made a very nice and polished speech to those corrupt politicians in Africa. Instead of naming each one of them and shaming them, he just talked around and around the issue. What effect did that nice speech have on them? Nothing, absolutely nothing. The bribery, corruption, nepotism and what-have-you persisted. Yes, I understand things have got worse. That is obvious otherwise what would have prompted you to embark on your long journey?"

"If ever I meet them, African leaders, under the same roof, the Donald will expose their corrupt practices one by one; by the time he finishes his speech, hardly anyone will be left in the room! Indeed, I will call them one by one by name and point out their corrupt practices to them – in front of the world press."

"A good many of them, indeed, are hiding considerable wealth in the US and other Western countries; meanwhile ordinary folks like yourselves continue to wallow in poverty. Bad, very bad people!"

"Mr President, if you are aware of such monies, then why do you not use your authority to help repatriate those funds back to where they belong?"

"Friends, the rules are not that simple. If, for example, I used executive powers to enact a law, they will appeal the case. And be sure of this: our so-called judges will rule against me, accusing me of infringing on banking confidentiality rules and regulations. It is outrageous, but the thieves are taking advantage of

such provisions in our legal system to commit criminal activities.” He paused for a while, probably to judge our response. He continued when nothing was forthcoming.

“The interference of our judges – sometimes I find it beyond belief. You surely must have heard about 9/11. Well, just to recap. On that day, on September 11, 2001, a group of Muslim zealots flew planes into the twin towers of the New York World Trade Center. That terrorist act led to the death of thousands.

“On assumption of power, I decided to ban Muslims from some parts of the globe from entering our country. I was just saying: ‘Folks, stay where you are and don’t come over to disturb our peace.’ Their religion preaches an eye for an eye. The Donald was doing nothing apart from following on the teachings of their Koran – to pay them on their own terms, an eye for an eye.

“As far as I am concerned, it amounted to simple logic. They hit us hard, so I decided to hit back. Lo and behold! The so-called human rights activists of the country found fault with the Donald!

“‘Why are you behaving in such a manner, Mr President? That is against their human rights!’ What about the human rights of those who perished in the demonic attack, my friends? In the end our so-called judges supported them and prevented me from paying them an eye for an eye.”

At that juncture he took a look at his watch.

“Friends, our time is very limited, so let us move on.

“Why are you singling out the US for help? You could just as well have contacted the Europeans.”

“We have done just that, Mr President. We have been to Berlin, Brussels and London.”

“Who did you meet in Berlin, Angelika Merkel?”

“Yes, Mr President?”

“Did she promise to help?”

“She only made vague promises.”

“The Germans, forget them! They are penny pinchers.”

“Pardon me, Mr President. English is not our first language so please be simple. May I ask you what you mean by ‘penny pincher’?”

“Oh, I thought you understood. Anyway, I just wanted to say that they don’t easily part with their money. That is not by any means speaking ill of them. That is the fact. Indeed, I have over the years demanded that they contribute their fair share towards the NATO budget – to no avail!

“They want to sell their big cars – Mercedes, BMW, VW – you can go on naming them – in the US. But they don’t want to contribute to their defence. Out of exasperation I decided to impose tariffs on their vehicles; now I bet they will begin to shout foul!”

He paused to gauge our reaction, then continued after a while.

“So, you got only vague promises in Berlin? What happened in Brussels and London?”

“The same empty promises, Mr President!”

“Well, that is the reality of the world we live in. Everyone for himself and God for us all. I wonder why people have issues with the Donald for his ‘America First!’ stance.”

“Mr President, I also have issues with that.”

“What is wrong with that folks?”

“We would have wished you would declare instead ‘Human Beings First!’, for, at the end of the day, we are all bound by our common humanity.”

“Before I comment on that, I’d like to ask you a question.”

“Please go ahead, Mr President.”

“I guess all of you have children, right?”

“Yes, that is the case.”

“Now If you wake up in the morning, who do you think first about, your own children or your neighbours’ children?”

“My children, Mr President.”

“Well, you have answered the question! Why then are you raising an issue with my ‘America First’ policy?”

“With all due respect, Mr President, I must disagree with you on the matter.”

“Why?”

“The comparison is not appropriate. Whereas it is indeed legitimate for you to consider your own children ahead of those of others, in my view it is a different matter when it comes to the general issue of world politics.”

“I don’t see it that way. It was the people of America who voted me to power; those are the folk I need to cater for first.”

“In my view, there is no need for such a statement, for when it comes to the standard of living you Americans are playing in the premier league with other nations like Germany, the UK, France, etc. We, on the other hand, are playing in the bottommost league!

“Indeed, Mr President, when I first set foot in your country, I thought I had landed in heaven instead of a country on Earth. Your beautiful cities, wonderful houses, excellent road network, your posh cars on your well-maintained roads... The people we saw on the streets seem very well fed, too. Everything abounds in your shops that are really impressive. So, Mr President, wherein lies our problem? Why do you create the impression as if doomsday is knocking on the doors of the beautiful American dream?”

“So let me see if I understand this correctly”, the president said, “you want me to open the gates of our country and let in the millions of destitute of the world?” He shook his head. “No, we cannot afford to do that! It is my duty, as the commander in chief of our armed forces, to defend our precious country from such an invasion!

“But to get back to the issue of poverty, want and suffering in your part of the world. Allow me to draw an allegory to my own life. I don’t know whether others have spread false news about

my personal wealth. I am not trying to blow my trumpet before the whole world, but the fact remains that I *am* wealthy. Indeed, I am a billionaire. I did not receive my billions on a silver platter. No, my billions were not handed down to me on a silver platter. I earned it the very hard way.

“On a few occasions, I was threatened with bankruptcy. Instead of giving up in despair, or resigning to fate, I chose instead to fight on.

“You people in Africa need to develop a similar mindset, or attitude. You must sit down and think, think, think, about ways and means of solving your problems, instead of waiting on others to do so for you.

“The other day I was watching a documentary on Africa on Fox News. I was really disgusted to see human beings crawling on all fours on the streets of a major city in Africa – I don’t remember exactly the name of the country concerned.

“I asked myself: ‘Where are the political leaders of the country? Why cannot the authorities erect homes to house such disadvantaged individuals of society?’ This is not a big deal at all. Surely it won’t require a great deal of effort to create such facility! Or do you expect the Americans to come down to get the job done?

“My goodness, what is going on in Africa! Well, I’d better keep my mouth shut or the fake press will tomorrow spread false news to the effect I resorted to derogatory terms to describe Africa.

“Concerning that particular instance that everyone has been referring to, I don’t really recall using the term attributed to me.”

“May I please know what Mr President is driving at?”

“Oh, it seems you have not heard the accusation against me. Never mind – you surely have much more pressings needs to attend to in your little village to be occupied with such whimsical rumours spread by the fake news press about me.”

“You are right, Mr President, we are so preoccupied with the challenges of everyday life that we hardly have the time or energy to follow everything that happens in the world.”

“Yet another issue I want to raise with you”, the president resumed. “The other day I was watching TV. I don’t remember which channel – definitely not CNN... I don’t watch CNN, its full of fake news – but let me continue where I left off ... Oh, pardon me, I forgot where I left off...”

“Mr President, I think you wanted to speak about something you saw on TV!”

“Oh, yeah! I remember. Yes, it was about the poor canalisation in one of the major cities of Africa. The condition has prevailed for decades, it was reported. The situation has worsened of late because of the citizens throwing litter into the open gutters to clog them and make an already bad situation worse. More than 20 years after the problem was identified, it has still not been resolved!

“I asked myself, why can’t they get the problem fixed? Surely there are loads of young men and women roaming the streets. Why don’t the authorities employ them to clean the gutters and eventually cover them? This does not require input of foreign capital to achieve, does it?”

“I could lecture you the whole day about the petty things you people could do yourselves to get your economy moving. Well, the Donald is a busy individual, so cannot find that much time for you.

“You touched on the rich resources of your country. What in God’s name is happening with all those resources – oil, gold, diamonds, uranium, cobalt, fertile soil, etc.? Wallowing in absolute poverty in the face of abundant natural resources! My goodness!” He paused. “I am really enjoying your presence. Unfortunately, however, I have a very busy schedule. Soon I’ll be called for another engagement.

“Before we part however, I want to propose a deal. I am indeed known for my deals. It is not for nought that people call me ‘the deal-maker president’. They have in fact always called me the deal-maker. I don’t make deals for the sake of making them. I am known instead for making only good sound deals; that explains how I have made my billions.

“I am not unaware of some of the challenges prevailing in Africa by dint of its location in a hot tropical climate. For example, parasites and germs that bring diseases such as malaria, Ebola, sleeping sickness, etc., thrive in your climate. Poisonous creatures like snakes and scorpions also pose a hazard to the human dwellers; lack of rain can also easily lead to drought and famine.

“Notwithstanding the prevailing natural challenges, I will request the US Congress for permission – you also have to seek the approval of your leaders – for what I term a ‘continental swap’! I am indeed proposing that we swap your African continent with our country.”

“What do you mean by that, Mr President?”

“One might in actual fact refer to it as a country/continent swap. What it entails is the following:

“Human beings on our respective continents will vacate their homes and their properties; they will be permitted to take along the barest necessities in the form of clothes and personal hygiene needed for about a week. Everything on the surface of present-day America will be taken over by the Africans. We on the other hand, will move and occupy Africa.

“I agree that we will be taking over a land surface larger than that of our country. In my opinion, it is nevertheless a good deal for the inequality in the surface mass of our respective countries (or continents), which will be compensated by the material wealth we have produced on our continent. I have in mind, among others, the infrastructure, the good cities, the technological advancement, etc.” He leaned back in his chair. “Yes, give

me Africa, and come and take our land. We will give you whatever you find here – the highways, the highly developed infrastructure, everything. But be warned, my friends, if you fail to take proper care of what we are bequeathing to you, if you mess up things, do not call on us in our beautiful Unites States of New Africa and beg us to come back and put things right for you. It is a done deal, okay! Only subject to the approval of Congress. I am confident they will approve it – for sure they will.”

We were so much taken aback by his proposal that, at first, we were lost for words. After the initial shock, Douglas as usual spoke on our behalf.

“Mr President”, he began, “is it real news we are hearing from your mouth, or are you perhaps quoting fake news, originating from the likes of CNN, NYT, WP, etc.?”

“This is real news; no fake news”, the president grinned.

“Indeed, you are hearing it from the horse’s own mouth. Subject to Congressional approval – and I will surely apply my influence on the House and Senate to approve the measure – I am certain the Republican-controlled House will approve the measure. I only need to convince the Democrats to come on board – but I’m sure they will agree.

“Indeed, taking over Africa with its huge reserves of minerals of all kinds, its vast agricultural potential, is something that should appeal to many business-minded folks. We only need to put measures in place to contain some of the natural hazards I touched upon earlier. I’m confident our brilliant scientists will be up to the challenge. We could set up vast solar parks and stations on the Sahara. Yes, we will utilise the huge solar potential of the Sahara for our common interest.”

“Mr President”, Douglas interrupted, “before we forget. We just want to draw your attention to the Poverty March that is scheduled to take place in New York the day after tomorrow.”

“Oh, I heard about that on Fox News. What has that got to do with yourselves?”

“The march came about through our initiative.”

“Hey, my friends form little Mpintimpi, do you want to turn the world upside down?”

“Mr President, it has nothing to do with turning the world upside down! It is matter of drawing the attention of the world to the harsh living conditions of ourselves and millions of others living in abject poverty. I want at this stage, Mr President, to politely put this question to you. Have you in all your life ever experienced hunger?”

“Hunger? No, never! My parents spoke about times, long before they got to know each other, when each of them had to struggle to make ends meet. Even then, their daily meals were assured. Thanks to the hard work of my parents, and later *my* hard work, I have never, I repeat, *never* known want in my life.”

“So, Mr President, you have no idea of hunger. We and millions of others have known and continue to experience hunger.

Indeed, just as we are speaking, millions of people somewhere on the planet are going about with empty stomachs while others are retiring to bed hungry.

“The idea of the Poverty March came about during our stay in London. It is taking place the day after tomorrow. The cardinal demand of the march will be a call for a legally binding daily income or benefit payment of one dollar and fifty cents per head for any resident of planet Earth independent of where he or she happens to reside.

“We shall publish a 10-point action plan outlining the proposals we are presenting to the world as to how the proposed benefit scheme can be financed. We hope we can count on your support, Mr President.”

“I am of course happy to support you, as long as it does not conflict with my America First agenda!”

“Mr President, I hear you are a believer.”

“Indeed I am.”

“Let me put a question to you: if Almighty God looks down from above onto Earth, what does he see first, America or the world?”

“Hey, my friend from Africa, why are you comparing me to God Almighty? I am an ordinary human being, the President of the US, so I see only America when I wake up from bed, so I am right to hold on to my America First policy, am I not?”

At this juncture he consulted his watch.

“Come, on, friends”, said he, “Get up and follow me, I want to show you a bit of the White House. Usually, I delegate the job to a subordinate, but somehow I’m beginning to fall in love with you. You see, other accuse me of being racist. I am not! To be honest with you, I get on well with everyone. The Donald does not have a racist bone in him, that is a fact!”

We were pleasantly surprised at the kindness meted out to us by the president; it was beyond what any of us could have imagined.

As he saw the awe in our faces while he showed us the magnificent corridors, rooms and halls of the historical building, he suddenly stopped. Looking at the four of us, he began:

“I can read from your faces that you are enjoying the viewing.

Others may want to conceal one historical aspect of the White House from you. That however is not how the Donald operates. I will be frank and open with you. In some respects this building owes you people a debt of gratitude.”

“A debt of gratitude? What do you mean by that, Mr President?”

“By virtue of the fact that it was built with slave labour; with slaves from your part of the world – they may very well have been your relatives, who knows?”

“Mr President, that then is a good reason why you should support our mission!” Douglas remarked.

“But you were not directly involved in the construction! If

anything, it is the African-American population, the direct descendants of the of slaves who could raise such an issue, not yourselves!”

“Mr President, in my view we also deserve compensation.

The slave trade depleted our continent of a good proportion of our well-built men and women. The strong and able-bodied ones deemed capable of making the treacherous journey were selected, while the weak and disable were left behind.”

“Well, my good friends, we better leave this explosive theme for now.” He continued: “Just to give you a brief history of the building... Construction work begun on 13 October 1792. On 1 November 1800, President John Adams became the first president to move into the newly-built premises. The building did not receive its present official name until 1901.”

After spending about 20 minutes taking us around, he took us back to his office.

Not long after we had taken our seats, one of his aides signalled to him that our time was up.

“Well, I’m afraid we have to part company”, the president said. “I have taken note of what you told me. I will present my proposal to Congress as already indicated. As I await the outcome of the deliberations of my continent–country swap proposal, I will urge Congress to release some funds to help establish a poultry farm in your village. Do take good care of it, folks!”

“Mr President, we are thankful to you for the remarkable kindness you have shown us. Indeed, contrary to how others have portrayed you, we have experienced you as a sympathetic, big-hearted and down-to-earth individual.

“We have decided to reciprocate your kindness by extending an invitation to you to visit our little village. Yes indeed, on behalf of the residents of Mpintimpi, we hereby cordially extend our warmest invitation to you to visit our humble village of Mpintimpi.”

“You are inviting me to visit your village?”

“Yes indeed.”

“Hey, Melania”, he called to the First Lady, “come and listen to this yourself! We have been invited to visit Mpiiiiin...”

“Mpintimpi”, Douglas helped him out.

“I better mind my words; otherwise I could be accused of disrespect for our friends from Africa. The next thing we know, CNN and the others will have picked on it and made fake news out of it!

“Seriously, Melania”, he said to the First Lady, “can we feel comfortable, even in their capital Accra? Let alone in Mpintimpi?”

“You remember I was in Accra recently”, she replied. “I enjoyed my stay. As for the little village, I have no idea. Well, they are human like ourselves, after all. If they are able to survive there, why not ourselves?”

“Well, even though I would like to visit, for practical reasons,

I don't think it can go ahead. There surely is no suitable landing place for the presidential helicopter."

"And the beast?"

"I don't think the FBI people will permit us to drive the distance from Accra to the village with the amazing presidential beast."

Turning to us he said:

"I am not going to turn down your invitation outright. I will pass it on to our chief of staff and see what he comes up with!" Shortly thereafter we parted company with the presidential couple.

The idea of the US/Africa swap proposed by the president made headlines over the next few days. Heated debates and discussions on the matter took place on radio, TV, as well as on various social media platforms.

Whereas others dismissed it as crazy, out of the blue, unworkable, etc., others thought it was something worth considering.

To quote one far-right newspaper in a country whose name I am withholding:

"If ever we embark on the swap, the lazy Africans will surely mess things up! Mark it on the wall – it will be only a matter of time when they line up on the borders of the New Africa pleading with us to let them in!!"

Other papers took a more moderate tone: "Let's just go down and build the infrastructure for them – roads, rail networks, airports, solar parks, hospitals, schools, homes, etc., and leave the place for them so they can just feel comfortable and so do not find the need to embark on treacherous journeys over the Sahara and the Mediterranean in their attempt to reach Europe. It is up to the Africans to take good care of their own countries; if they don't, they would have no one but themselves to blame."