

Press Releases: The 2018 Secretary's Awards for Corporate Excellence Event

Remarks
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MS SINGH: Good afternoon. It's my pleasure to welcome you to the 19th Secretary of State's Awards for Corporate Excellence. I'm Manisha Singh, the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. Deputy Secretary Sullivan wanted to be here today, but he sends his regrets because unfortunately he got called to a White House meeting. But he wanted me to congratulate the winners on his behalf.

I'd also like to recognize several ambassadors who have joined us here today: the ambassador of Togo, the ambassador of the African Union, and the ambassador of Ethiopia. I'd also like to recognize U.S. Ambassador to Togo David Gilmour, and Bureau of African Affairs Ambassador Stephanie Sullivan, and Ambassador Matt Harrington. We're very privileged to have Under Secretary David Hale here to help us recognize the winners and present the actual awards to them.

So without further ado, I thought we would go ahead and present the awards to this year's wonderful winners.

First, we have the Award for Corporate Excellent in Sustainable Operations. Our winner in this category is PVH Corporation, which operates in Ethiopia. An industry leader and one of the largest apparel companies in the world, PVH works to maintain and promote sustainable business practices. Accepting the award is Emanuel Chirico, CEO of PVH. (Applause.)

And our next category is Women's Economic Empowerment. This year's Award for Corporate Excellence in Women's Economic Empowerment goes to Alaffia,

operating in Togo. This company directly employs more than 700 women in rural Togo, and it pays salaries that are four times the average family income. I congratulate them for that and all of the great work they're doing. And I'd like to invite Rose and Olowo-n'djo to receive this award from Under Secretary Hale. (Applause.)

And I want to thank Under Secretary Hale very much for helping us to present these awards to these great companies. And I know you have a very busy schedule, so unfortunately he has to leave, but thank you again, Under Secretary Hale, for being here. (Applause.)

With that, I want to go into a bit more detail about these companies, because you're going to be absolutely amazed when you hear what they do. First, about PVH Corporation. PVH has envisioned a state-of-the-art, vertically integrated and sustainable industrial park for the production of garments. To achieve this aspiration, PVH brought like-minded partners together to create an industrial park in Hawassa, Ethiopia, where fabric mills and apparel factories powered by renewable energy sit beside a treatment plant that reduces the park's environmental impact. Good practices.

Employing more than 15,000 workers of which 88 percent are women, this park is a model of bilateral government and business cooperation between the United States and Ethiopia. The ultimate goal of PVH's model industrial park is to provide a better future not only for the workers and their families, but also to inspire responsible industrialization across Ethiopia for the betterment of the entire population, and to produce a new market for U.S. products benefitting workers here at home. It's a win-win for us all.

Next, I want to tell you a little bit more about Alaffia. Alaffia's story begins in rural Togo between an American Peace Corps volunteer – Rose – and a Togolese local – Olowo-n'djo. This story illustrates the power of cross-cultural understanding and innovative entrepreneurship. Founded as a social enterprise, Alaffia alleviates poverty and advances women's equality through fair trade and indigenous resources from West Africa to produce health and beauty products for the global market. The company also contracts with more than 14,000 women as suppliers. So it's not only the women that they employ directly, but their supply chain effects that provide a platform for women's economic empowerment. Alaffia dedicates 15 percent of its fair trade sales to community projects that improve maternal and child health, promote education and better protect the environment in Togo.

I'd also like to tell you a little bit more about the Secretary's Award for Corporate Excellence. We've been recognizing outstanding companies since 1999. These companies uphold high standards and represent American values in the way they do business. One of the reasons we wanted to recognize these two companies here today was for the great work that they do, but also to inspire other companies. We hope that other companies will look at their model and say, "We should be doing that as well."

The mission of the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs is to empower growth and secure our future. This mission can't be achieved through government policies alone. Companies and workers play an integral role and

produce growth in local economies here in America and abroad. Smart, successful businesses with sustainable operations and community development will contribute to all of our success. Markets and operations around the world create jobs, create prosperity, create security, both at home – here at home and abroad.

The winners today in Sustainable Operations and Women's Economic Empowerment are a sign of our times. At this point in consumer purchases, we've found that American consumers, worldwide consumers, want to purchase products that are sourced responsibly, that are made by companies who care about the environments in which they operate. So responsible business is not just a smart thing to do, but it also contributes to a company's bottom line.

U.S. companies practice high ethical standards, they pay fair wages and provide healthy and safe working conditions. For these reasons and more, local communities abroad want to work with American companies. We hope to continue these partnerships. We consider successes in Sub-Saharan Africa to be our successes. We'd like to think that success can be shared for all of us.

Women's economic empowerment is a key priority for the Trump administration. Women make up more than half of the world's population but only 40 percent of the global labor force. Closing the global gender gap in labor markets could increase worldwide GDP by as much as \$28 trillion by 2025.

You'll hear today why we need more companies to follow the model of PVH and Alaffia. We'd like to show you firsthand the stories of these companies. We have a brief video clip about PVH, and then we'll hear from Mr. Chirico.

(Video is played.)

(Applause.)

MR CHIRICO: Thank you very much. I really want to thank everyone at the State Department for this prestigious award, particularly Under Secretary David Hale, who took time out of his schedule. He was running around like crazy today, so we appreciate that he came by to present the awards.

I also want to congratulate Alaffia. I think the – it is a – it's really an honor to share the stage with Rose and Olowo-n'djo at this time, to see what you're doing as an entrepreneurial company that's really trying to do well financially, but at the same time empower women around the world and create opportunities. It's really an honor sharing the stage with you.

I am honored to be here to accept the Sustainable Operations Award on behalf of PVH, in recognition of our best-in-class apparel industrial park that we've built in Hawassa, Ethiopia. It's a proud moment for PVH, our partners, and our almost 40,000 associates around the world. As one of the largest apparel companies in the world, we have a – we are in a unique position to make positive impacts in the places where we live and in the places where we operate our business. And one of those places is Ethiopia, where we set out almost five years ago to create a sustainable, integrated apparel

manufacturing facility with the highest standards in environmental and social sustainability.

We had a vision: to create a state-of-the-art supply chain facility, and we brought likeminded partners together to create a model designed to spur economic growth without polluting or depleting Ethiopia's natural resources. Today, thanks to the hard work of our team, our associates around the world, and our incredible partners, we are seeing this vision come to life in Hawassa Industrial Park.

We are focused on protecting the local environment using sustainable energy and ensuring sufficient supplies of clean water. We are creating a safe and inclusive workplace for all of the associates in Hawassa, men and women, creating opportunities for the residents in all the surrounding areas and providing economic growth. And we have been committed to embedding best-in-class manufacturing and supply chain practices and operations throughout Ethiopia.

The Hawassa Industrial Park is expected to result in 60,000 jobs over the next three years and features state-of-the-art machinery focused on environmentally advanced practices. The park's zero liquid discharge treatment facility recycles over 95 percent of the waste water produced. This helps preserve Lake Hawassa, which serves as the community's water supply and is the center of the local ecosystem.

I'm very proud of the operations we've established, but we certainly didn't get there on our own. None of it would have been possible without the commitment and collaboration of our partners and their unwavering support throughout this journey. Our supply partners, the NGOs that worked with us, government representatives both here in the United States and in Ethiopia that has enabled the 10-year extension of the AGOA agreement, has really been a benefit for us and has allowed us to make multi-million dollar investments in Ethiopia, as well as the support of our U.S. embassy in Ethiopia, which has really helped us work through the issues that come up on the ground there.

And I also want to thank our PVH associates around the world, our PVH associates in our supply tent, and in particular, our chief supply chain officer Bill McRaith, whose vision was captured by this project. He was the leader within PVH. He was the one who sold the project at the board of directors level, presented it with such a passion, that clearly it came through and we knew we had to be in Ethiopia and make a commitment to it. He played an intricate role, and it wouldn't have happened without his dedication and his vision.

This this honor is a testament to our company's unwavering commitment to power industry change the right way. On behalf of our almost 40,000 associates around the world, I am very proud to accept this ACE Award. Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

MS SINGH: Thank you very much. And now, we're going to see a video about Alaffia.

(Video is played.)

(Applause.)

MS SINGH: And now, I'd like to invite from Alaffia Rose and Olowo-n'djo to tell their story.

(Applause.)

MR TCHALA: Thank you. We have to tell the State Department when people are married, they need two microphones because they – (laughter) – because they share everything. I was told in the State Department you have to be – everything has to be right on time and not to go off script, not to go off tangent, and – but I feel quite safe. I have my wife here; I can go off tangent, I'll be quite protected. (Laughter.)

As you can tell, this a bit of emotional evening for us. I believe it is a big day for Togo, it is a big day for West Africa in general. For me, it's more than a big day because it is a way to indicate that you can grow up in a very small room and the State Department will allow you in a big room. (Laughter.) And I hope that young people around West Africa can see that hope that things can be better. But it is also a big day for our people in Washington State. A great team there is watching this very closely, and they are quite proud that we get to come here today.

Well, first, I would like to thank Under Secretary Hale, and most of the biggest thanks is Assistant Secretary Singh here today. We are quite – being here and being given this honor means a lot to us. And not only that, to have an assistant secretary that really care about women's issues, it means a great deal to us. And of course, our new friends. (Laughter.) It is our new friends. We have already described how we're going to introduce new lines of product already. (Laughter.) Yes. After all, I didn't think Washington was just a great place, but it is a great place. (Laughter.) It is, it is. Well, we're quite honored to be among of you, and thank you for the work that you're doing in East Africa. Thank you.

Now, I want to recognize Ambassador David Gilmour, who is among us here and have come all the way back from Togo. And Ambassador Gilmour, without going too much and too much to say, what he has done for us, being proactive in the policies in Togo and being our friend and caring about the equality of women in the past three years, have allowed us to have a secure supply chain, which help us to expand our work force in Washington State. Thank you, Ambassador Gilmour, and thank you for nominating us. Thank you. And of course, I would like to thank Ambassador Hegbe, Ambassador of Togo, being here. Thank you for joining us this evening as well.

I will spend most of the few minutes or few seconds I may have left just thanking folks. In life, we ought to be grateful. We do what we do because we are grateful. And I am sure to tell you – you may wonder, being a man and

stand before you today, talk about economic empowerment of women, but yet, I'm a man. And I will tell you, it's not by accident. There are three women in my life that have made this possible, and clearly, one of them is my wife and partner. And this is my opportunity to thank the Peace Corps services. (Laughter and Applause.) Yes, they – without causing too much trouble here, I do believe – and I really do believe – the greatest investment or the greatest return on investment that the American Government have ever made in having Peace Corps office is in me by sending a Peace Corps volunteer to go – to go invest in me and to come to this great country.

So, Ms. Rose – I said three women, and I'll be quite clear, and I – it will be my wife, Rose, and if there's a word that you'd like to add, I'd be – I'd be quite happy. (Laughter.)

MS HYDE: So if you haven't already realized, I'm the quiet side of Alaffia. (Laughter.) Quiet in looks and in words. But I do just want to say one brief thing, and that is we just received an award for empowerment, but I would like to acknowledge that that award is empowering us. It's empowering us to become a business to the next level by aligning us with more established, well-known companies like –

MR TCHALA: PVH, yeah.

MS HYDE: Yeah, PVH. And it not only empowers us but I believe it's going to be empowering many millions of small business owners around the world. So thank you. (Applause.)

MR TCHALA: So back to the three women that helped me stand here. It is not only that Rose contributed to us making two beautiful daughters, but clearly, joining the Peace Corps, and us finding a life here together was the very belief that is important to care about women.

And second, I would like to thank Rose's mother, Judy Elven. When I came to the U.S. I couldn't read or write in English, and Rose's mother taught me how to read with children's book. And I can tell you, you can't run an enterprise if you don't know how to read. And through that learning I learned the importance and the role of a woman.

And lastly is my mother, Ina Agbanga, and she's not here in the room tonight, but she's with us in spirit. It was my mother that with her eight children in the eight-by-10 room that told us that we were smart, that we were strong, so our situation should not be the bearing for us. But she was the one, too, that showed me humility. She was the one that would give out food to those who are trying to cross the border. I grew up in a border town to try to go look for work in Benin or Nigeria. She would give out food to them that we already have so little. And as a young boy I learned that you can have little and you can still share.

But she also taught me what I'm trying to do today, which is to see the suffering in many, and that suffering is the reason why we do what we do today. There's no reason for people to have to suffer unnecessarily. Well, now, how do we pay for reducing that suffering? This is bringing us back to

America.

For this award, I would like to thank all our customers across this great nation that purchase Alaffia product. Without them we wouldn't be able to create jobs in West Africa nor the jobs in our great state of Washington. So I thank our customers.

And ending by saying that it is also clear that aid – not to say aid is not important. Aid, in the form of development, is important. But everybody will agree that aid alone cannot bring safety to the world, and aid alone cannot eradicate poverty. And I'm referring to the type of poverty in the very rural area, in the countryside. That's really what we're talking about is those women from very far away from cities that would never be able to engage in the global economy. The aid cannot do it. And the very fact the economic process is the solution in my view, and what we have done, while we may be small as an organization, is it is possible that small enterprise can engage in a global economy and those that may not know how to read or write, as women around the world, can participate in the global economy. We don't need to wait for 10 or 20 generations to come; they can participate today. And for this, I thank the State Department for recognizing the importance of using economics as a way to reduce poverty and we thank you.

Finally, almost. (Laughter.) We made an agreement in the hall with our friend, our new friend, that he will speak very short and I will speak very long. (Laughter.) He will speak with precise and substance, and I will talk philosophy. (Laughter.) Well, we're in the world where you need mathematicians and an artist. That's kind of our relationship. Well, really, I do – I can't tell you how pleased I am to stand here. It means more to me and all of those that are part of Alaffia than we can possibly imagine. And for this entire Alaffia family and myself, we will continue to make Alaffia proud around the world and here in America, and we now, just like our friends have done, encourage other American companies to do the same. We need not wait for the State Department or to wait for the U.S. Government or any other agencies around the world to engage with the women in rural area. Businesses, midsize businesses, can engage and they should engage today. Because if they do, there's one thing that business does: make money. We know we can make money. You can make money by supporting women in the rural areas. (Applause.) Thank you.

Thank you. (Laughter.) And then to reduce poverty. And I ask myself, what is there to be a human being if we can't contribute to another fellow being? And the opportunity that Alaffia has given me, the opportunity that you encourage us tonight, means I am not only a human being, but that you've given me the ability of continuing to contribute. And I think it's the greatest honor that you could have in life to contribute to others, and to do a right.

So I end here by thanking all of you for being here tonight. And I can ensure you it is the beginning. We have many more millions, if not billions of people in the countryside, and they too deserve to have access to the global economy. And I hope and I believe within 150 years the world will be a safe place because there's economic activities for all of us.

So thank you. (Applause.)

MS SINGH: We want to congratulate our winners again. And as you can see, we're giving these awards to companies, but behind these companies and their great missions and their great successes are people. These are people who care about these issues and who are trying very hard to incorporate all of these practices into their companies worldwide.

I want to thank you all for being here and for caring about these issues as well. It's important that, as Olowo-n'djo said, that this is a beginning, that we take this, and as Rose said, it – we want to empower these companies to do more. We want other companies to look at them and say, "This is how we should be." At some point, we don't want to give an award recognizing women's economic empowerment. I don't want it to just be one or two companies or 10 companies that we recognize. We want it to be something that everyone does, it's – there's need to give an award because women's empowerment is just a part of good corporate practice. We want to see that world, and we think that these companies are the ones who are making that possible.

So I want to thank the companies, but I want to thank them as individuals, as people, for doing what they do. I want to thank you all for being here. And just a quick couple more thank-yous to the teams in EB, the EPPD team who's here recording and taking photographs, to our Commercial and Business Affairs team. (Applause.) And to the Africa Bureau, the AF Bureau, who has been an invaluable partner for us on this. We appreciate all of your time, all of your assistance, and with that, I want to invite everyone for celebratory drinks over here in the Jefferson Room. And I hope that you will have time to talk to our corporate winners. I know there's a large contingent here from PVH, so I hope you will have a chance to talk to all of them as well.

Thank you all so much for being here today. (Applause.)

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