

**KEYNOTE STATEMENT MINNESOTA EAST AFRICA BANQUET
26 OCTOBER 2024**

Honorable Mayor of the city of Minneapolis,

Honorable elected officials,

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends,

At the outset, on behalf of the President, the Government and the good people of Djibouti, I wish to convey warm greetings to the elected officials and the wonderful people of the great city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. I want to thank the Minnesota Institute of Horn of Africa Studies for the opportunity to speak to you about Djibouti, East Africa and the very promising continent of Africa.

I also wish to express my deep gratitude to Minnesotans for having opened your arms and hearts to many of our brothers and sisters from East Africa when they needed it the most. I am informed that a large number of the individuals and families, immigrants and refugees that you so generously welcomed today form part of a strong and engaged community. A community that was successful in fostering a sense of belonging and meaningfully contributing to the economy and cultural vibrancy of the state. A community that is entrepreneurial, that builds bridges and connects Minnesota to the continent in a variety of ways.

Dear friends,

I am glad I am finally able to make a trip I have been planning for a long time. Minnesota is a consequential state. I am sure like many other international visitors reported, I discovered Minnesota while listening to Prince, your very own, this very famous son of the state who helped put Minneapolis on the map. I was struck by the deep, meaningful lyrics and the funky sound of 1999, a protest song against nuclear proliferation. A song that ends with Prince repeating and hauntingly asking: “Mommy, why does everybody have a bomb?” I bought the album in 1982, I had just turned 14, I did not know much about nuclear proliferation and I never could have imagined that four decades later I would sign on behalf of Djibouti the landmark nuclear ban treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the UN headquarters in New York. But I still have a strong recollection of how I felt the first time I heard the song. It instilled a deep sense of fear in me. I was glued to the record player as I listened to it continuously. I have been and I remain a fan of the great deceased artist until today. I share my passion for Prince with my daughter Raisso whose acapella rendition of Sign of the Times is both mesmerizing and soul touching. It is a shame she won't do it here because she is a little too shy. By the way, I am accompanied today by my wife Fatouma and two of our children, Gueldon and Raisso. (Please identify yourselves).

Let me underscore the vital importance of regular visits by African ambassadors to US cities to discover the history, the people, the technological advances, science industry and cultural attractions. That is exactly the goal that the

Experience America programme led by the US Department of State and the office of the US Chief Protocol seek to achieve. The programme has proved to be very successful as it yielded tangible results in building relationships aimed at promoting economic and commercial partnerships since its inception in 2008.

Strengthening ties between US cities and African countries through visits, partnerships, exchanges and two-way trade missions is a good way of promoting economic cooperation. To prove that point, let me highlight the findings of a study undertaken by the CSIS Africa Programme, a US think tank in 2020. They researched the links between Africa and 15 US cities, including Minneapolis. The resounding conclusion is and I quote “US cities’ ties to the continent contribute to its local industries, foster political leadership, enrich cultural life and advance academic scholarship”. End of quote.

We, African Ambassadors accredited to the US, have to travel to out of Washington once in a while and visit US cities to see what your beautiful country has to offer. We also have to use the platform we are offered to tell a different story about the continent. The prevailing narrative about the continent of Africa focuses on death, disease, despair, conflict and poverty. While recognizing the fact that we continue to face enormous challenges on our development journey and the guns are not silenced despite our best efforts, the continent is resource rich, is growing fast and offers vast opportunities as an investment destination. Africa is huge! Its land mass exceeds that of India, China, the US and Europe combined. Its population is growing and will reach 2.5 billion in 2050, which means that 25%of the world population will be African.

African leaders have adopted in 2013 a strategic blueprint called Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want. The aim is a prosperous continent of nations at peace, economically integrated through the Africa Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and occupying their rightful place in the world. This Africa will be industrialized. African based industries will be turning Africa's mineral endowment into advanced products for African and world markets. This Africa will tap the continent's vast agricultural potential. Africa will no longer be a treasure house of commodities to be harvested and mined, and trucked to the nearest port to process and generate profits in the global North and Asia. African built electric vehicles will be powered by batteries assembled in Africa using cobalt, manganese and rare earth elements mined and processed in Africa. The electricity to charge those batteries will be generated with African sun, wind, hydropower and other carbon free technologies.

This is the vision we have and we want to partner with this great country of yours, the United States of America, to realize that vision. There is definitely a role to play for US companies, including the ones in Minnesota. Business opportunities abound and there is money to be made. Records show that companies that invest in Africa are getting higher return on their African investments than those in other regions. This growth trajectory will continue as new discoveries in terms of resources are made in countries that are currently not important resource exporters. Thus, the new discoveries (oil, natural gas, minerals...) being made in East Africa, including Somalia, are bound to significantly impact the economic map of the continent. We in the region have to promote an environment of peace, security,

mutual trust and cooperation for those gains to materialize. Djibouti will do everything it can to promote peace and helpful regional conduct.

It is in Djibouti's DNA to promote peace. Some of our Somali brothers and sisters present here tonight might recall the innovative Somali led conference that Djibouti, under President Guelleh's leadership, held in Arta some 25 years ago. One would have to read in its entirety to appreciate the full depth of that inspiring and very important speech that President Guelleh delivered in September 1999 at the UN General assembly, at its 54th session, to share with the world the philosophy and the elements of its initiative for peace in Somalia after years of failed attempts, “pervasive indifference and a lack of resolve, vision and action”. But allow me to quote an excerpt that reflects Djibouti's commitment and the sense of trust it places on the ability of our Somali brothers and sisters, when given the space, to resolve their differences and shape their own future:

“It is time for Somali civil society, including intellectuals, artists, and mothers to assume responsibility... In line with the wishes of the Somali people, Djibouti is embarking upon measures intended to enhance and strengthen Somalis’ confidence in themselves, in each other and in their common destiny, to make a real contract of trust and progress between the actors of economic, social, cultural and intellectual life and to implement with determination, serenity and equity the work of rehabilitation, political, economic and the promotion of a culture of dialogue between the Somali people.”

The outcome of the Arta reconciliation conference allowed Somalia to reclaim its seat at IGAD, the AU and the UN. Somalia is understandably proud to have been elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council as it prepares to begin its mandate in January 2025. Somalia needs all the support it can get to reestablish itself as a key country in the Horn of Africa.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Djibouti is a loyal and committed friend of the US. We have maintained excellent relations since our independence in 1977 and the establishment of our diplomatic relations with the US that same year. But we have opened a new chapter when we opened our territory to the US at its request after the 9/11 tragic terrorist attacks against the USA. Djibouti hosts the only enduring US military base on the continent of Africa. Large powerful countries see value in securing a presence in Djibouti because of its strategic location on an important trading route. It is situated on the Horn of eastern Africa where the Red Sea meets the Indian Ocean. To the Northwest is Eritrea, west is Ethiopia and southeast is Somalia. A few nautical miles away is Yemen. It is situated on one of the busiest shipping lanes. Djibouti has therefore leveraged its geography to position the country as a logistical hub. We have invested in the development of world class ports and we are seeking to use its transport links to build a trade and connection hub for Africa. As president Guelleh recently explained: “Djibouti is firmly committed to regional and economic integration, including initiatives such as the AFCFTA.”

Djibouti strategically invested in big ports because big, competitive, ports mean big business. We have built several free trade zones around ports that focus on regional trade, and the storage, processing and export of goods to and from East Africa. We have big dreams for ourselves and the region. We are on our way to become the gateway into the heartland of the continent. We would like to think ourselves of the future Singapore and in spite of the challenges, we are committed to continue supporting critical shipping lanes. We are concerned by the continued attacks on merchant and commercial vessels from Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen as they caused major disruptions in trade flows and increased shipping costs. We continue to demand that they cease those attacks as the world works on finding solutions to avoid further escalation and ease regional tensions.

Djibouti punches above its weight is a comment some of you might have heard in reference to the outsize influence we play in regional mediation processes, the stand we take on major global issues and the close proximity with large powers, including the US. Our response is that size does not matter when peace is at stake. We explore all avenues to promote peace and give our voice to articulate an honest opinion and demand justice, accountability and respect for international law.

Colleagues, friends,

Djibouti is proud of the partnership it has with the US. it will always be a key security partner to the US. We have shared interest in regional stability and unimpeded trade flows. We value the great working relationship with the State department and other US agencies involved in advancing this partnership. We would

like to see the US expand its economic footprint in the country. We have taken steps to continuously improve the business environment to attract foreign direct investment (according to the World bank, it is the 14th best country for business in Africa). It is a peaceful and very stable country. It enjoys financial stability; its currency is pegged to the dollar since 1949 and freely convertible. It is a vital crossroad for global communication as all internet traffic between Europe and Asia passes through or adjacent to Djibouti thanks to its digital infrastructure and submarine cables. It is a hidden tourism gem (unsaturated and pristine beaches, activities such as scuba diving and swimming with whale sharks, Lake Assal, the lowest point of Africa and Lake Abbe to cite just a few). So thrill seekers and adventurers from Minnesota, look no further. Djibouti is ready for you. Opportunities for investment also lie in renewable energies, mining infrastructure technology, real estate, transportation, manufacturing and education. To conclude, Djibouti is open for business. US investors are most welcome. Let us focus on investments that generate wealth and create jobs for Americans and our people. We rely on you good friends to help tell a compelling narrative about Africa, East Africa and Djibouti to fellow Americans. US cities matter. Minnesota matters. Africa matters. Let us build a bright future together. Long live the Djibouti US relations! Once again, I am grateful for our warm welcome.

Thank you for your attention.