

National News

In an exclusive interview, Ms Sarah Troutman, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) for the Bureau of African Affairs, told *Daily Monitor's* Ismail Musa Ladu why the Trump administration has made a significant policy shift. Anchored on "Trade, Aid," this policy will be pursued with several nations, including Uganda.

What is the purpose of your visit to Uganda in particular and Africa in general?

I am here to celebrate our commercial diplomacy efforts and advance that priority across the continent and especially in Uganda. As you know, President Trump, and Secretary of State, Marco Rubio have really emphasised rebalancing our trade relationships and creating mutually beneficial commercial partnerships. And that's our focus in the Africa Bureau at the State Department.

We started off the year by wanting to prioritise commercial diplomacy trip to the African continent. And for Uganda, we see many promising economic opportunities here.

That's why I prioritised a trip to Kampala at the start of the year. It's been very interesting to hear about the Ugandan government's growth agenda. And we certainly want to make sure that U.S. private sector companies are involved in that and taking advantage of every opportunity, especially as we're celebrating America's 250th anniversary.

It's a really important time for us to be getting the good message out about our private sector and the opportunities that those companies provide to our African partners.

Are there any particular or potential deals you are looking at while here in Uganda?

With every trip, I try to advance particular deals to move the ball forward for the US private sector and support our embassy colleagues.

The first priority in our commercial diplomacy strategy in the Africa Bureau was to make commercial diplomacy a priority for all of our hosts abroad, as well as for our Africa Bureau office in Washington.

So, we are very supportive of Embassy Kampala's efforts to advance those goals and create more economic opportunities for US businesses.

While I've been here, I've been impressed to hear from many Ugandan ministries about the available opportunities sectors like transportation, telecommunications, emerging technology, agribusiness, critical minerals, and others.

Part of my goal is to advance opportunities for businesses that are already bidding on certain tenders.

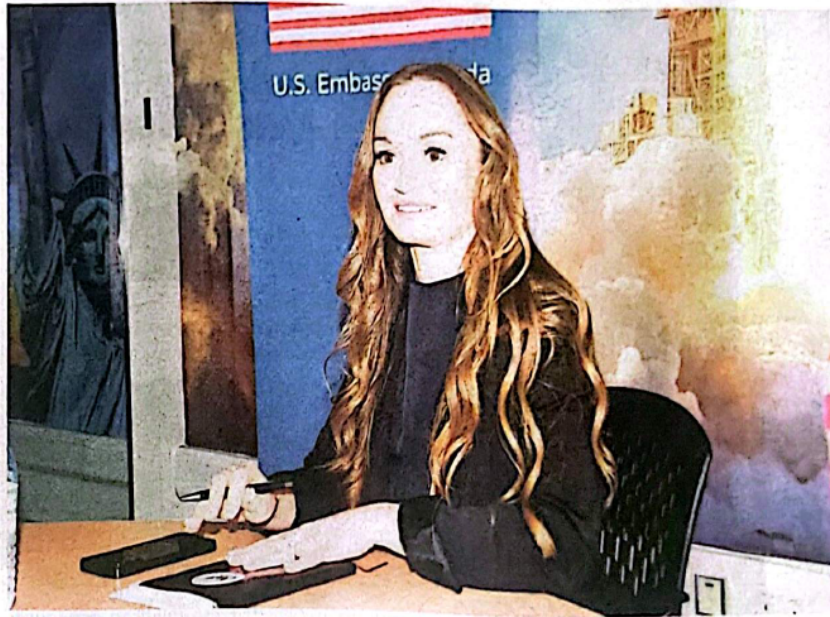
But also, to source information about future opportunities to take back to Washington and socialise it with the business community.

African economies like Uganda have both opportunities and challenges. Have you observed any impediments derailing business between US companies and Ugandan companies?

Part of my goal for visiting was to ask US companies about specific constraints they face, and we've had really good feedback throughout the week. The second part of our commercial diplomacy strategy is about addressing business-enabling environment concerns so that even more US businesses can have opportunities to thrive. The same environment should also enable Ugandan businesses to thrive.

We know that corruption and transparency remain an issue in different sectors throughout the economy, so we

'US eyeing Uganda's minerals, telecom'



Ms Sarah Troutman, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) for the Bureau of African Affairs during the interview, last week. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE

are really urging and emphasising on transparency.

We've also heard that equal and fair application of tax laws is a challenge for some US businesses. So, we would want to see a levelled playing field for US businesses and for all companies.

We would urge the government to really implement the tax code in a fair and transparent way. And we look forward to hearing updates on things like that as we go back to Washington.

Uganda would also like to trade with the US without impediments. Was this also discussed?

Yes. Our embassy here always does an excellent job of sourcing feedback from Ugandan businesses and connecting them with opportunities in the United States. Our priority is certainly rebalancing our trade relationships across the continent.

We want to increase US exports to Uganda, and we also want to make sure that Ugandan businesses, especially in key sectors like agriculture, and I would definitely emphasise coffee, cocoa, and vanilla as key exports that Uganda has. We want to make sure that we're creating those opportunities so that we can really ensure mutual prosperity.

How are you approaching commercial diplomacy in economies like Uganda and Africa as whole?

First of all, we are making sure that our US diplomats are prioritising commercial diplomacy and economic partnerships in their work.

This means ensuring US businesses are treated fairly and we're raising any concerns they have. Also, sourcing new opportunities by really listening to the Ugandan government and private citizens here about the opportunities that

might be available for US companies to invest. That also means ensuring that we back in Washington are getting the most updated information so we can share it with the private sector.

We want to tell a good story about the chances available here for US companies to invest. While we know that there are business-enabling environment challenges, we think that there are opportunities that are sometimes overlooked for lack of connection. Therefore, we want to be bridging that gap so there are opportunities for both Americans and Ugandans to thrive.

There have been significant reductions in USAID funding for Uganda since early last year, causing widespread job losses in key economic sectors, including health and NGOs. Is this a sign of a change in the relationship the U.S. intends to have with economies like Uganda?

I would say that our focus is on shifting our relationship from one based on assistance to a mutually beneficial commercial partnership.

We certainly see Uganda as a capable commercial partner, and want to emphasise that aspect of our relationship and increasing bilateral trade.

I would also highlight that the US still remains the largest assistance donor to Uganda through bilateral channels and international financial institutions.

We're really excited about the memorandum of understanding (MOU) in health signed in December 2015 involving \$2.3 billion. We are grateful for the co-investment from the Ugandan government. We think that's an excellent model as we move forward.

The termination of Uganda from the African Growth and Oppor-

MAJOR ISSUES

Sarah Troutman, who coordinates the administration's priorities in Africa, visited to advance US-Ugandan commercial diplomacy. Her visit only paves the way for American investment in sectors as critical minerals, telecommunications, and agribusiness also secures a place in the government's 'heart and mind'. She emphasised that the treatment of American companies will entice other Ugandans to Uganda.

portunity Act (AGOA) remain a concern. Any discussion about having it reinstated?

We were pleased to see Trump sign the AGOA Extension to law. We know that also actively, and it will be a sensation so that the administration time to update and optimise the programme.

We're always happy to see Uganda's eligibility with the law, and I think those conversations are ongoing. In the embassy here is continuing opportunities for Uganda to export to the US in an official way.

The impact of the AGOA poses potential threats to Uganda's exports like coffee and even vanilla. But so been a recent policy by the US Supreme Court developments. What went on how this could look for Ugandan exporters?

I know it's a hot topic. Once it becomes clear the impacts of the pronouncement we will make the update. Trump's tariff agenda on rebalancing trade ensuring mutual prosperity.

He sees many African capable commercial partners want to emphasise trade rather than a partnership.

I would say that Uganda also face similar challenges like to address them.

That said, despite key exports to the US are created.

We have seen a lot of exports, we see a lot of cocoa as well, and vanilla remains a key market. So we think ports that will continue to grow.

Anything else

We will certainly be back in Washington many opportunities for US businesses to have opportunities in the economy, working link and some of the opportunities.

And we think deals are being treated exist in Uganda will only encourage. We look forward to progress.

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The latest deal signed between US and Uganda. It is a co-investment meant to boost Uganda's health sector.