

**Speech by Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Mali**

**Mary Beth Leonard**

**on the Occasion of U.S. Independence Day**

**On Wednesday, July 4, 2012**

**Bamako, Mali**

It is an honor for me to welcome all of you here for the commemoration of the 236<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the declaration of the independence of the United States of America.

I would like to take this occasion to sketch a brief scene from American history for you. Benjamin Franklin – a brilliant scientist, writer, and diplomat – was one of the key figures in the struggle for American sovereignty. A few years after independence, Franklin was asked what kind of state had been created with the forming of the United States. He answered, “A republic... if you can keep it.”

If you can keep it... With this brief phrase, Franklin gave a very wise word of warning to the young country he had helped create, but also to anyone living in a country with ideals worth preserving. Democratic institutions and the promises of democratic, lawful governance need constant attention and nourishment. The vision of representative democracy must be encouraged and nurtured or it will erode and decay. Franklin’s warning, “If you can keep it...,” tells us that there is work to do, or we will lose the legacy of freedom and democracy that was passed on to us.

America has had many struggles to maintain the Republic that Benjamin Franklin passed on to us. Sometimes it has been a hard road. For example, our society has had to confront injustice in our laws in order to extend the guarantees of basic human rights to all our citizens. We fought a civil war over fundamental disagreements about human liberties and the way forward for our country. We then had to find healing and reconciliation to establish a common identity and sense of unity for the country again.

But keeping the Republic is also the result of daily decisions made by countless Americans—those who choose to serve their communities and country, those who pay attention to whether the responsibilities of democratic, lawful governance are being fulfilled, and, if they are not, act constructively and peacefully to make a change in the interest of the wellbeing of all citizens and the preservation of the principles of democratic life.

Mali is no different from America in this regard. The road to preserve, nourish, and fulfill the legacy of democracy and peace, as well as the promises of democratic, lawful governance in Mali, will have some very hard times. Now is one of those moments. A coup d'état led to a complete upending of democratic governance in Mali. This affair was accompanied by one just as difficult to witness—the fall of the north into rebel hands, and subsequent implantation of those who do not share Mali's ideals of tolerance and compassion.

The suffering caused for Malians is multiform. Malians in northern cities chafe in environments of scarcity, insecurity, and intolerance. We recently witnessed the destruction of revered Malian World Heritage sites, long-honored as emblems of Mali's contribution to Islamic civilization and world scholarship. Hundreds of thousands of others are now displaced far from their homes, communities, and livelihoods. And for all Malians, the impact of this government breakdown on the economy, especially during a drought and food security crisis in the Sahel, raises concerns for their daily welfare. I know that the struggles and suffering of Malians are ever present in the minds of everyone here in this room.

American legislation is clear—when a democratic government is overthrown, we are obligated to cut certain forms of bilateral aid until a democratically elected government is installed. This law is a reflection of our deep belief in democracy and in the responsibility of governments and citizens alike to respect the institutions and systems that support it.

But we have not wavered in our commitment to act in solidarity with Malians. On the humanitarian front, the United States is providing nearly 60 million dollars of assistance to Mali for therapeutic feeding of mothers and children, Food for Work programs, and food distributions. This is part of a larger contribution of nearly 320 million dollars for the Sahel region. We are also funding programs to assist with the health and well-being of internally displaced persons and refugees. We will continue programs that support humanitarian assistance, resilience in food production, youth unemployment, and health care provision.

The United States looks forward to the arrival of a democratically elected government as swiftly as possible. That will allow us to resume the full breadth of our partnership with Mali. We hope that all Malians and the interim government will work together in the higher interests of Mali's people. In so doing, they must set aside partisan advantage and ambition, old mistrusts, and perceived grievances alike in favor of the citizens they serve through this brief transitional period. We expect the perpetrators of Mali's coup to recede to the narrow consultative role on military reform which the framework agreement has consecrated to them. We expect them to abandon any pretensions to influencing government, as well as any actions that contribute to a climate of intimidation and fear. Now is the time for all Malians to support the return of Mali to the community of democracies, where it has long held a place of honor.

Mali is not alone in its fight to keep its republic. Rather, Mali is in a context rich with resources of regional partnership and international concern. The United States joins the international community in staunchly supporting this country's territorial integrity, and we look forward to working with our partners in the region and beyond in addressing grave challenges both to Mali's north and to the Sahel's security in general. The offer of assistance from ECOWAS and others who share Mali's concerns is a hand of friendship that should be swiftly accepted by all those interested in the most rapid resolution of this crisis.

Indeed, Mali's very cultural heritage is a testimony to the strength of collaborative and open approach to conflict resolution and governance.

When I look at the rich history of this country and its people, I find great confidence and hope for the future of a stronger, brighter Mali. Malians have generations of tradition that form a national character of consensus and dialogue. If there is a country able to overcome this kind of ordeal, it is Mali.

So, as we celebrate today the independence of the United States, honoring all of the Americans who have faced the challenges of democracy since the birth of our Republic, we also keep in mind the difficult trials Mali is enduring, and we stand with you as you work to keep and to strengthen your Republic.

Thank you.