

Earth Day Opening Remarks
Ambassador Zumwalt
Screening of Documentary on Environmental Movement in U.S. Produced by
RTS
April 25, 2016

(As prepared)

Recognitions

Good afternoon.

A famous African proverb reads: “The Earth is not a gift from our parents, it is a loan from our children.”

On Friday, we observed the 46th annual Earth Day. This first Earth Day in 1970 is widely viewed as the birth of the modern environmental movement in the United States.

It is fitting that we gather today to watch a documentary that was created by talented RTS journalists Seydina Alioune Djigo and Amadou Gueye Diop. They aim to raise awareness among the Senegalese public about the role of grassroots organizations in protecting the environment. Through a State Department grant, the two travelled to Washington, New York, and Los Angeles to make of this film. They produced a 52-minute documentary that presents the role of environmental activists, community-based organizations, and government agencies in changing public attitudes about environmental protection. From history about the first conservation laws and powerful public service announcements that educated Americans about the environment, to the water treatment methods in my home state of California, I hope you will learn something about the U.S. environmental movement.

This film also features Senegalese diaspora in the United States discussing their experiences with going green once they immigrated to the United States.

The history of the environmental movement in the United States is dynamic and inspiring. Mainstream America largely ignored environmental concerns, until the publication of a book called “Silent Spring” by Rachel Carson in 1962. The book documented the detrimental effects on the environment—particularly on birds—of the indiscriminate use of pesticides. The book represented a watershed moment, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24 countries. It raised public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and links between pollution and public health.

The idea for Earth Day as a national day to focus on the environment came to Senator Gaylord Nelson after he witness the destruction caused by a massive oil spill along the California coast. Inspired by the student anti-war movement, he realized that infusing the energy of young activists and educating the public about air and water pollution, would force the discussion about environmental protection onto the national political agenda.

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans took to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment in massive coast-to-coast rallies. Groups that had been fighting against industrial pollution, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, over fishing, trash along roadways, and habitat loss for wildlife suddenly realized they shared common concerns and could forge common cause.

Earth Day 1970 marked a watershed moment for the United States. By the end of that year, the United States congress created the United States Environmental Protection Agency and passed the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts.

Senegal also has a proud tradition of civic activism. I know you are dedicated to improving Senegal's environment. We appreciate the chance we have had to join you in such activities such as the beach clean-ups in Yoff.

Our embassy Green Team conducts regular cleanups in our neighborhood as well as along the coast. The Green Team also arranges tree plantings, at local schools and along the Corniche. We also focus on changing the behavior of our employees to make more environmentally conscious decisions in the workplace and at home.

Did you know that this building one of the "greenest" in West Africa? The embassy chancery, which is three years old, was built with technologies that lessen the impact on our host country's ecosystem.

The building's design results in 35% less power consumption than standard building of same size and solar panels power more than 25% of our facility. Eighty percent of the water we use in our landscaping is recycled wastewater that is treated at our own Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Let me end by saying that the Paris Climate Agreement represents a significant turning point in global action on climate change and I was encouraged to Macky Sall represent Senegal in New York to sign this agreement on April 22. The Climate Agreement will set the world on a course to a low-carbon future.

Once again, thank you for coming. I hope you will enjoy the film. Please stay after for a brief discussion.