

**Remarks for Ambassador Zumwalt  
CESTI, Dakar  
Cheikh Anta Diop University  
April 27, 2016**

Monsieur Ibrahima Sarr, Directeur de CESTI.

Students and Faculty.

Thank you all for coming today. I am delighted to speak with you today and to answer your questions. First, I want to offer sincere congratulations on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Centre d'Etudes des Science et Technique de l'Information (CESTI). CESTI has an excellent reputation in the region and, I am sure, will prepare you well for your future as journalists.

I want to begin by just briefly noting that I have a great appreciation for your choice of journalism as a profession. My sister, Barbara, is also a journalist, in California. I am proud of her role in educating the American public.

Journalists form a fundamental part of any healthy democracy. You provide oversight over elected governments. You provide a voice for those who cannot speak. You seek the truth when no one wants to hear it. From today's Panama Papers to the 1970's Watergate scandal, there is a net benefit to society when journalists are able to practice, write and speak freely and accurately.

Your work as journalists is important to an open, democratic society. And those democratic values are exemplified by an open press and are part of the basis for the strong Senegalese – U.S. relationship. I am here to discuss our bilateral relationship and the important role you – youth – are already playing in the future of Senegal. There is an African proverb that says: **When deeds speak, words are nothing.** Senegal's young people such as yourselves represent the nation's future. You demonstrate enormous potential when it comes to improving the economy, strengthening democracy, fighting extremism or working to promote human rights.

When I reflect on the fact that Senegalese youth make up more than sixty percent of the population, I see enormous potential for the nation's progress. I am heartened to meet young people who are contributing to this progress and I'd like to share a few illustrative stories.

## DEVELOPING YOUR ECONOMY

First, let's talk about economic growth. Future growth will depend on the rising generation. In the United States, this generation is known as Millennials. You may already know that – but if you haven't heard of it before, Millennials are those born in the late 1980s and 90s, and who are now joining the workforce. Millennials have grown up in an electronics-filled and increasingly online and socially-networked world.

This makes Millennials very different from previous generations and enables them to look at the world differently. Perhaps because of the immense potential that comes with these technologies, Millennials expect more and are often willing to do more to make the world better. I see the interest in entrepreneurship in Senegal as a key indication that your generation will not be content to just find work. You will want to find meaningful work. You will want to create and run your own companies. By creating small businesses, you will help drive the economy.

I'd like to share a brief story about a Senegalese entrepreneur named Mame Khary Diene whom I have the pleasure to get to know. In 2007, she began creating natural beauty products in Senegal and, after initial success, looked to exporting her products to the U.S. While she encountered some challenges, she was resourceful. She persevered and developed relationships with women-run cooperatives in the Kedougou region that provide shea butter and other ingredients for her products. Ultimately, she was successful in exporting to America. Today she is the proud CEO of Bioessence Laboratories and I visited the cooperative in Kedougou where previously unemployed women have found jobs thanks to her initiative.

In another example, just last week, we hosted a Global Innovation through Science and Technology Bootcamp for 56 young West African entrepreneurs to pitch start-up solutions to address economic and development challenges. The products and ideas they pitched were incredibly innovative. One Senegalese has developed a mobile application to connect drivers and passengers for carpooling while another created a platform for farmers living outside Dakar city to have real time

information about where their products are needed and when the prices are best. We are following their progress and that of the other ten Senegalese entrepreneurs and hope that they will soon find the funding they need to introduce their products to market.

Small to medium businesses – or SMEs – are the engines of prosperity in almost every economy, driving job creation, sales and, hopefully, exports. Whether it is Mame Khary’s Bioessence enterprise or the future enterprises of the Boot Camp participants, these are the innovations that will drive Senegal’s economy.

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In 2010, President Obama created a program designed to harness the potential of the young generation through the Youth African Leaders Initiative (YALI). In the last two years, 30 young Senegalese leaders have spent six to eight weeks in professional training programs in business, public administration and civil society at U.S. universities.

The nice thing about YALI is that it invests in people who turn around and do amazing things.

One such leader is Elhadji Abou Gueye. Originally from Guediwaye, Elhadji Abou went to Cincinnati, Ohio and (Fayetteville), Arkansas on the 2014 YALI public management program. Upon his return to Senegal, he created Banlieue Up to improve the physical, mental and economic environment in his neighborhood, an area where youth unemployment and concerns about terrorist recruitment loom high. He started by addressing basic needs, helping to build the first water filtration system in the neighborhood.

Today, the community is using the new filtration system to recycle water, which saves money, protects the environment and creates jobs.

People like Elhadji Abou are the future of Senegal. With the right tools and opportunities, he has given back to his community and effected positive change while creating a new business.

## STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

In politics as well, young men and women like yourselves, are not satisfied with accepting the status quo. I think of Y'en a Marre and journalists joining together to hold the government accountable and register youth to vote. Their influence has

gone beyond Senegal and motivated others to demand reform. In 2015, they were active in Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo, sharing Senegal's tradition of active citizen involvement and responsible youth social activism.

## FIGHTING EXTREMISM

While the ideals of democracy can spread across borders, unfortunately, so can the threat from violent extremism. The attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire showed us that no country is immune to terrorism – it is a regional threat. These are threats that we can only overcome by working together. The U.S. has been a partner, including through joint regional military exercises, like Flintlock and Obangame/Saharan Express this year, to be better prepared to combat violent extremism wherever it appears.

Your President, Government and civil society have been incredibly outspoken in rebuking terrorism. Senegal has a tradition of tolerant co-existence – among ethnic groups, different religious communities and among brotherhoods. Senegalese religious leaders are known for resolving conflict, not stoking it and they stand together against anyone who claims religion as a justification for violence.

No one has a more direct interest in a secure future than your generation – a future that will allow you to focus on your careers and families without the fear of terrorism. In the Embassy's work with Cheikh Anta Diop University, we learned recently about the good work that an association of students is doing through their organization, "Mobilization for Peace and the Consolidation of African justice (MPCA)" to promote a culture of peace and tolerance at the university. By making students and the public aware of the threat of terrorism and by helping them recognize recruitment methods, they create a safe and stable learning environment. I am impressed with their project, Caravan of Knowledge, which provides positive alternatives to vulnerable youth and monitors popular internet sites against attempts to incite hatred or radicalize students. With groups such as MPCA, Senegal can be a model in the region and world for its commitment to religious tolerance.

But, as we know, combatting violent extremism is complicated. I already talked about improving employment for youth, strengthening democracy, and improving infrastructure. Societies that are strong in these areas will better resist ideologies of violent extremism.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Combatting violent extremism, though, also means creating a society where there is hope and opportunity for the most vulnerable. Children who are forced to beg on the streets are certainly vulnerable – invisible to the outside world, they are vulnerable to the worst kinds of exploitation, including by terrorists.

No society, no country, no government is perfect – the U.S. included. In the U.S., we will still struggle with poverty and racism. Here in Senegal, it is heartbreaking to see destitute young children begging on the street. No child should ever be forced to beg in exchange for basic necessities like food, water and shelter.

I applaud the government officials and local organizations working to advocate for the rights of these children. Issa Kouyate is just the kind of person who instills faith in humanity through his dedication to ending forced begging and trafficking of children. He created La Maison de la Gare in Saint-Louis as a safehouse for hundreds of boys each day, and as a beacon of hope for thousands more. The center offers literacy classes, a sports program, and instruction in basic hygiene, medical care, art workshops, apprenticeship training and much more. I was fortunate enough to meet Issa last year, after he went to the United States on a State Department program on countering trafficking in persons. I believe that the word inspirational is often overused. It should be saved for truly remarkable people, but Issa is clearly one of those people.

Last, I want to tell you that I have been in Senegal for just over a year and truly appreciate the opportunity to travel your beautiful country, from St. Louis to Ziguinchor, from Kedougou to the Senegal River Valley. But even more than the beauty of your country, I have been truly charmed by the people of Senegal whose hospitality and friendship never cease to amaze me.

The stories of Elhadji Abou, Mame, Issa and others are just a few from among the many young people I have met in my travels in Senegal. Your generation will push boundaries, and demand better. You will know more, see more, and have access to more information than I ever did and in return, I know you will change your world. But you must embrace change, demand change, and pursue change.

Before I end, I'd like to ask you a very Millennial question. Are you all on Facebook? On Twitter? Good. Then, I want to finish by asking you to follow us on our Embassy's Facebook and Twitter sites (both are usembassydakar). We want to hear from you as well as share more information about the United States and our

activities here in Senegal. To that end, I'll be hosting a Facebook chat in June so follow us to find out more.

Thank you for being a great audience. I appreciate your time and look forward to your questions.

Jere jef!