



**University Speech  
Ambassador Lewis Lukens  
U.S. Engagement in Senegal  
University Gaston Berger, St. Louis  
Thursday, January 10, 2013**

*(As prepared)*

The Rector of University Gaston Berger,

Professors and faculty of UGB,

Dear Students,

It's such an honor and a pleasure for me to be here with you. I have been Ambassador to Senegal – and Guinea-Bissau – based in Dakar since August of 2011, and my first trip outside of the Dakar region was in fact to this great city of St. Louis.

During that visit I met with government officials, civil society groups, and others. Even though I did not have a chance to visit the university during that trip, I learned about this university's wonderful reputation, and I am so happy to be with you today. We are so appreciative of the relationship that we have with University Gaston Berger, characterized by many aspects:

- an English Language Fellow, Mr. Jeffrey Dow, currently teaching and living among you here at UGB;
- over a dozen Senegalese from UGB who have competed successfully to obtain our most prestigious scholarship, the Fulbright;
- and most recently, an important discussion with the new Minister of Higher Education, Mr. Niane whom of course you all remember as your Rector here until just recently. Mr. Niane was selected by President Sall in large part because of his excellent work here, and we are confident that the new Rector is also leading this institution with excellence and as a model for the nation.

In short, University Gaston Berger has been a solid source of strong academics who are prepared to compete on an international level, and we are so pleased to be partnered with this fine institution.

This occasion gives me the opportunity to talk with you about the engagement of the United States in Senegal: what our relationship with you means to us, and why we are working so hard to strengthen it every day.

Africa and its people are partners with America in creating the future we want for all of our children—a future that is grounded in growth, mutual responsibility, and mutual respect. And as we look toward the future, it is clear that Africa is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community, and to the United States in particular. On the continent, Senegal is widely recognized as a leader in terms of its democratic political culture, as exhibited by the elections that took place last spring, and the peaceful and orderly transfer of power that followed those elections. Americans recognize that Senegal is one of the only countries in West Africa never to have had a military coup. We want to see Senegal continue this excellent record and we'll do all that we can to help you on that path.

We are also proud of our cooperation with Senegal's well-trained and disciplined military. The participation of Senegal's armed forces in international and regional peacekeeping missions is greatly appreciated by the international community. And during the presidential election in the spring, we saw soldiers and police upholding democratic principles by steering clear of politics. Senegal rightly deserves many compliments about the expertise of this very professional body, and we thank you for that. It is so important, because with better governance, I have no doubt that Africa holds the promise of a broader base for prosperity.

On the political front, Senegal is doing well. Economically, it could – and perhaps should – be doing better. As Secretary Clinton said in Dakar in August, it is not democratic progress that has to be achieved before economic progress, nor vice versa. They need to move forward together. Politicians know how important economics are. Everywhere in the world – including, and especially recently, in the United States -- economics is a driving factor in elections. However, that is not why economics are important. Economics are important to serve one's population. In Senegal, it means lifting up the poorest of this nation's almost 13 million people to ensure that they have their basic needs met. It also means giving enough flexibility and ease to this nation's budding entrepreneurs to allow them to develop and grow and help spur this economy on.

Seven of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world are in Africa. It's really good news that trade between the United States and Senegal rose 20 percent last year. It's also good news that the IMF recently reported that Senegal's democratic resilience has positioned you to achieve long-term growth. I am confident that with Senegal's political leadership, it can and will achieve the economic gains it seeks. The United States wants to partner with you on the road to that success.

The Obama Administration's comprehensive strategy on Sub-Saharan Africa is based on four pillars: first, to promote opportunity and development; second, to spur economic growth, trade, and investment; third, to advance peace and security; and fourth, to strengthen democratic institutions. Our partnership with Senegal embodies all four of those pillars.

President Obama's vision for Africa is based on the premise that "Africa doesn't need strong men. It needs strong institutions." In Senegal, your government understands that and is working on making sure its institutions perform. It is responsive to its people and is doing its best to drive forward this nation.

The beginning of a new year always gives one the opportunity to reflect on the year ahead. The year 2013 will be important to our Embassy for many reasons, perhaps most notably for two reasons.

First, we will open up a new Embassy building which will embody our large and strong relationship with Senegal. I invite you to come and visit it someday when you are in Dakar – we will have a new high-tech information resource center that students, faculty, and researchers will be welcome to visit.

Second, this year will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peace Corps in Senegal. Since 1963, over 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers have worked hand-in-hand with Senegalese partners on building strong institutions in a variety of fields. Currently, 260 Peace Corps Volunteers who speak French, Wolof, Pulaar, Serrer, Malinké, Mandinka and Jaxanke [Jack-AN-kay] are working in Sustainable Rural Agriculture, Urban Agriculture, Environmental Education, Rural Health, Agro-forestry, and Small Enterprise Development. Perhaps some of you were touched by an experience you had with a Peace Corps Volunteer in your youth. Many Senegalese have told me such stories since I have been Ambassador, and I'm always thrilled to hear about the impact of these hardworking Americans. I have given the oath to 171 Volunteers since I got to Senegal, and this is always a highlight for me.

While not particular to just the year 2013, I also want to highlight the work of the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). MCC-Senegal is in the midst of its five-year compact and many of the projects are happening up north, close to St. Louis. MCC is responding to Senegal's wish to reduce poverty and increase food security by conducting major infrastructure projects in both the North and the South. The projects are rehabilitation of major national roads -- the RN2 and RN 6 -- and also development of irrigation and water resource management infrastructure, including bridges at Ndioum and Kolda.

Finally, I want to mention our flagship development agency that has been extremely active in Senegal for over 50 years now: The U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID. The principal goals of USAID in Senegal remain: helping achieve food security and economic, political, and social development *in line* with the priorities of the Senegalese government. I could give this entire speech alone on the great work that USAID does in Senegal. While I cannot do that today, I do want to make sure that I mention that through USAID, the American people support more than 1,600 health huts that provide care in villages outside the reach of government services. We have provided nearly three million insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets to Senegalese since 2007. We have helped Senegalese farmers and fishermen increase production and safeguard food security. We have also helped open up markets to Senegal's indigenous products. We have provided civics education that has helped people make informed decisions about their country's future. USAID work touches on all areas for our President's strategy for Africa.

We are working with you because you have proven your sophistication and advancement politically, and we are confident that you can do so economically as well.

I would like to end on a personal note: recently, I had the opportunity to host my parents here in Dakar. My father was the DCM in Dakar in the late 1960s, when I was a young child. This was my parents' first visit back in 42 years. You can imagine the changes – both good and bad – that they saw. It was very interesting to share in those memories and reflections with them.

My own wish is that I could come back here in forty-two years and see a Senegal that had changed radically, but only for the good. That I could see a Senegal that USAID had left because it was no longer needed. A Senegal that had chosen its international partners very carefully and was working with other African, European, and American companies on equal ground. A Senegal that had achieved all that its people asked of it.

To the students in this audience, I say to you: you have the power to hold your leaders accountable and to build institutions that better serve the people. America will be with you. As a partner. As a friend. Freedom is your inheritance. Now, it is your responsibility to build upon freedom's foundation.

Thank you for your attention today, and thank you for all that you have done to make your country great. I cannot wait to see what you will do for Senegal in the future.