



Speech
Ambassador Lewis Lukens
U.S. Independence Day Reception
Hotel Azalai, Bissau
July 8, 2013

(As prepared)

Salutations....

Good evening, and thank you for joining us to celebrate the 237th anniversary of U.S. independence and the adoption of our Declaration of Independence. Families throughout the 50 United States celebrated this wonderful occasion last Thursday with barbecues, games and spectacular fireworks displays.

I am happy to be back in Bissau on this occasion. In the past month or so several changes took place here that we hope are the first steps towards a more democratic future for your country. A future where all Bissau-Guineans will enjoy the benefits of freedom and democracy.

I congratulate the transitional authorities and all political parties that went through months of intensive dialogue to reach an agreement on the “inclusive government”. This move has allowed the community of nations and international organizations to provide support to Guinea-Bissau. The United States and like-minded nations also hail Guinea-Bissau’s upcoming elections in November as a momentous step towards these goals. Free, fair, and transparent presidential and legislative elections -- in line with national legislation and international standards -- will make it possible for all Bissau-Guineans to enjoy the fruits of democracy.

I also want to encourage the Transitional Government’s work with the international community, including UN organizations, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), ECOWAS, the AU, and other governmental partners. Foreign Minister Delfim da Silva recently stated that he will promote “non-confrontational diplomacy” aimed at regaining the confidence of partner countries in order to open new doors. This is a positive step, and I look forward to seeing progress towards this goal.

During this time of change in Guinea Bissau, it is also important that the press be allowed to operate freely. Along with a vibrant and developing civil society, a free press plays the critical role of informing citizens and keeping governmental agencies and officials in check. We will continue to call on Guinea-Bissau’s leadership to demonstrate its commitment to uphold international obligations and ideals, to carry out justice -- but to do so, while respecting the human rights of all.

Thank you, and enjoy the party!