

Remarks
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Independence Day Remarks
July 22, 2014
Bissau

(As prepared)

Every year in July, Americans celebrate our country’s independence, proclaimed in 1776. The Declaration of Independence is based on the premise that our destiny will not be determined for us, but rather by us. It states that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

The patriots who wrote the Declaration of Independence knew there was a better way of governing and that freedom was possible. They were willing to lay down their lives, risk their fortunes and pledge their honor to achieve that freedom. Although the odds were against them, the Americans ultimately prevailed in the Revolutionary War, proving their doubters wrong.

Like the people of the United States, the people of Guinea-Bissau fought for their independence. And like us, you believe that the people alone are sovereign, as we saw once again in this year’s election. The return to constitutional rule, the restoration of the people’s sovereignty, marks a new beginning for the country and a chance to achieve reconciliation, reform, and recovery.

The United States looks forward to productive cooperation with the people of Guinea-Bissau and with your new government. It is vital that the government listen to the people, who have clearly and patiently demanded leadership that serves the public interest. Through the ballots they cast, the people have given their newly elected leaders not only a mandate but also a message: Guinea-Bissau needs a government that serves all, not just some.

We encourage Bissau-Guineans to unite behind the efforts of this government to ensure comprehensive reforms, the provision of public services, and immediate progress on crucial development issues.

Recent years have shown that elections alone do not assure democratic rule. Nations that hold fair elections where the winners are accountable to clear standards of good governance share a key advantage: strong civil institutions. The days of “government knows best” – with information, contracts and public sector performance statistics hidden away – are coming to an end.

Open government responds to citizens’ desire to be heard by their leaders and involved in the decisions that affect them. Open government can provide economic and social benefits. One

of the keys to good governance is openness in developing reforms and policies that improve the economic, security, and social situation of everyone, not just the elite few.

As the momentum for reforms builds, the government must work to make its progress open to its citizens. Courage will be needed, as both advances and setbacks will be encountered.

People are now rightfully demanding a say in how their lives and society are managed. It is vital that the Government of Guinea-Bissau, along with its international partners, including the U.S. government, seize the moment together.

This moment is an historic opportunity. Success will come when the new government accepts its responsibility to govern well and build confidence with Bissau-Guineans and the international community.

Thank you all for coming this evening. It is an honor to celebrate America's independence with you.