

Remarks Independence Day celebration 2016

(Protocol opening)

Good evening and thank you for joining us to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the independence of the United States of America.

We are delighted to be together in this beautiful venue at the new Hotel Radisson 2 Fevrier. We are here thanks to the very generous financial support of several private sector donors: American companies and companies who sell American products and services. They are:

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Mr. Masud Zaidi

The Embassy is proud of our partnership with the business community here in Togo. Please join me in thanking our donors with a round of applause.

I'd also like to acknowledge our musicians, my friend David Elpidio and his group (name?). They represent Togo's many talented musicians, painters, dancers and artists who enhance the quality of life for all of us. Culture raises the profile of the country and makes Togo a better place to live, and that represents an important contribution to economic development.

Our themes for this evening's celebration are two concepts for which America is well known: innovation and freedom of expression. We are representing those ideas with images of Silicon Valley, the center of technology innovation in California. The entire world knows Silicon Valley as the source of thousands of innovations that define our existence today: personal computers, the Internet, Google, the iPhone, Facebook, and many other examples.

It is not by accident that Silicon Valley developed in the United States. America's technology industry has succeeded because of many elements. Three of those elements are particularly important: education, freedom of expression and the rule of law. The people who work in Silicon Valley and other centers of innovation in the United States are very well educated. Nearly 50 percent of them have university diplomas, compared with the general American population, of which 28 percent has a university degree. They work in an environment of transparency and intellectual freedom, where ideas are freely shared and exchanged. That free and open atmosphere stimulates competition and innovation. The fruit of their labor is protected by a strong legal system that facilitates commercial contracts, protects intellectual property, and gives confidence to investors.

The success of Silicon Valley offers inspiration for Togo, as the country continues to make positive reforms and modernize the economy. Since my arrival in Togo, I have spoken often about Togo's excellent potential for economic development, thanks to its location at the heart of a fast-growing regional market of 300 million people, a world-class seaport and airport, valuable natural resources and the friendliest people in West Africa.

Togo has the possibility to "take off" and build a modern and innovative economy for the 21st century. To do so, there will need to be a massive effort to build human capital, in the same way that Silicon Valley has done. Education will be critical. Togolese youth will need education that is practical and relevant to the job market. More Togolese will need to speak English, as Togo becomes integrated in the global economy. The education system will need to be flexible and provide learning opportunities for citizens throughout their lifetime.

In order for talented and educated Togolese to be innovators, they will need an environment of freedom of expression, open exchange of ideas and civic participation. That is why Togo's process of political reconciliation and democratic development is so important.

The United States has recently recognized Togo's progress toward political and economic reform through the selection for the first step of the Millennium Challenge program. We encourage Togo to continue making reforms in order to qualify fully for the Millennium Challenge Compact and to create conditions that will bring increased investment and jobs.

To reach that objective, Togo must strengthen rule of law, increase government transparency and accountability, and expand democratic participation to give all citizens a voice. The United States encourages a transparent and inclusive process that will lead to local elections in the near future and we are ready to facilitate dialogue on constitutional and institutional reforms.

Democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law are not just political issues. They are absolutely essential elements for sustained economic success.

Permit me to mention one other element that is vital for a country's success: opportunity. In the United States, we have a large population of African immigrants, and that population has tripled in the past fifteen years. I have spoken to many African immigrants in the United States about why they went to America. Whether they are from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Senegal or Togo, they all tell me the same thing: they went to America for opportunity. They left their home country because they believed that opportunities for career success and happiness were better elsewhere, in a foreign country.

All of us must work together to ensure that opportunities are available right here for all Togolese, so that people will not feel the need to leave the country in order to be a success. We want to see conditions that will also encourage talented Togolese who are living abroad to come back and help build this country.

I have spoken to many Togolese who live in the United States, and I can tell you that they are very interested to come and invest and start businesses. During my stay in Togo I want to increase the connections between the United States and Togo through commercial and

educational exchanges. I am pleased to say that goal will soon be greatly facilitated by the launch of direct air service three times a week from Lome to New York, on board a Boeing Dreamliner, with Ethiopian Airlines.

Togo is living through a rare moment with a great potential for success. But success cannot be taken for granted, and these favorable conditions will not last indefinitely. Togo is in competition with other countries around the world that are making reforms to attract investment. Togo cannot sit back and rest on its recent successes. Togo must seize the opportunity, have the courage to make bold changes, and then go out into the world and talk about them. Togo is a small country, but it must begin to think and act like a big country.

Tonight we are pleased to welcome several young Togolese entrepreneurs who have participated in Embassy programs to promote entrepreneurship. Like their counterparts in Silicon Valley, they represent the creative spirit of innovation here in Togo. I invite you to visit their displays and learn about new ideas and innovations “made in Togo.”

Thank you again for joining us this evening. I encourage all of us to work together to bring positive changes that will allow these young entrepreneurs and thousands of others like them to unleash their creativity and energy, and to realize their potential, to make life better for everyone in Togo.