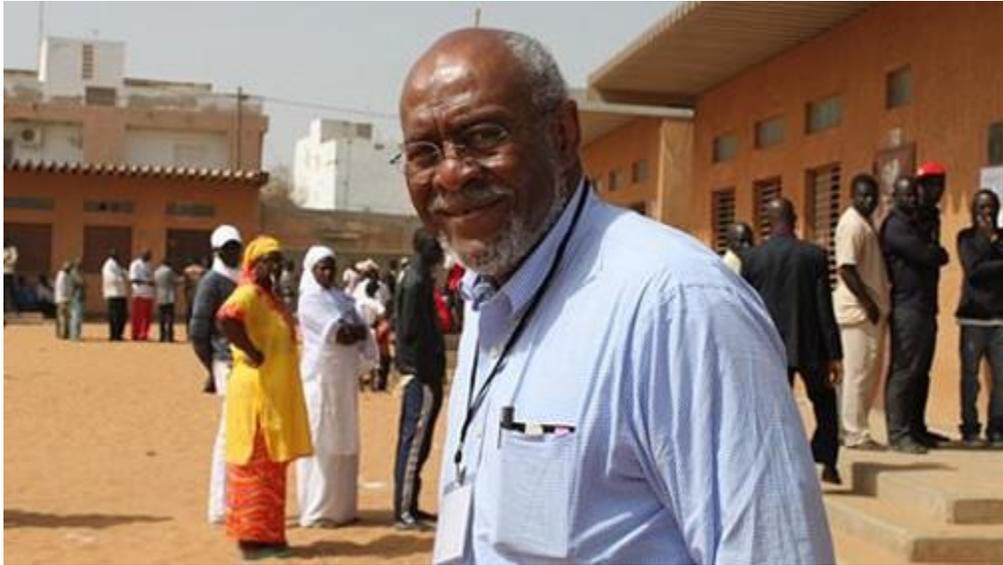


A/S Carson's podcast on Senegal's Presidential elections

Ambassador Johnnie Carson, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs



Length: 06:27 - Size: 8.9 MB - Format: MP3

Also available at <http://dakar.usembassy.gov/podcast.html>

Transcript

QUESTION: You just returned from Senegal where you lead a team of observers during the first round of the presidential elections. How did the first round go, and will the U.S. observe the 2nd tour?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: I had an opportunity to participate as an observer in Senegal's recent presidential elections. I would like to compliment the people of Senegal for the way in which they conducted themselves during this election campaign. I had a chance to visit a number of polling stations in and around Dakar. In each and every one of those polling stations I witnessed an orderly, peaceful, and transparent process.

I want to say also that the organization and the individuals who were manning the polling places did a very, very respectable job. In some of the stations the level of management is some of the highest I've seen in recent years in monitoring elections. My observations – personal observations – mirrored those of many of the observers from the Embassy who travelled out and across the country. There were 27 U.S. Embassy observation teams scattered around Senegal, and most of them reported similar findings. A well organized process, peacefully conducted, little or no harassment, little or no intimidation.

We really do want Senegal's next round to be as free, as fair, as transparent, and as well-organized as the first round. It will help to ensure that the people of Senegal have an opportunity

to select the leader that they want to lead them over the next several years and into the future. Every democracy is built around good elections. Representatives selected by their people to be the stewards of their Constitution and their democracy for a limited period of time.

Senegal is important to the United States, enormously important to the United States. It has been one of our strongest partners in francophone Africa since its independence in 1960. It has been one of West Africa's most stable and peaceful countries. It is a country that has never experienced a coup d'état, unlike almost all of the other states around it. It has been a country that has been open and receptive to taking refugees. And its port has been an economic transportation hub and a gateway into the interior of West Africa. It is important that it remain democratic. It's important that it remain stable, and it's important that all of its leaders live up to the spirit and to the letter of the constitution that they are working under and on behalf of the people of Senegal.

QUESTION: Does the United States have any concerns regarding how the second round will be conducted, and how will the outcome affect U.S./ Senegalese relations?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: At this point, we don't have any major concerns about how the 2nd round is going to be conducted. We want it to be conducted in a manner similar to the 1st round. Transparent, free, and without violence.

We are looking for the same high degree of transparency. We will have observers travelling around the country as we did in the first round. We know that the European Union, that the African Union, ECOWAS, and others will also have observers, and we know that there will be – most importantly – a large number of Senegalese observers from civil society who will also be watching the outcome of this elections. If this election is run freely and fairly, the United States will certainly continue to work very closely with and recognize the leader who comes out of this process, but we will wait and reserve our judgment until after the process is over. If we see any serious, major flaws in the process, we will speak out against those flaws.

We will not remain silent to any efforts by any party of any set of individuals to undermine the vote of the people or the democratic process, or the electoral process. I think that in the last several years, we have made it very clear, and have spoken very clearly about how we see elections. If they are good, fair and represent the will of the people, we say so. If we believe that they contain serious flaws, and are lacking in transparency, we say that as well. Looking back over our comments on elections across Africa over the last several years, you will see that we have tried to have our views reflect the reality on the ground and what we have seen in terms of the process.