



**Remarks by U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Robert Yamate**

**Regional Air Chiefs Conference  
August 30, 2012**

*(As prepared)*

(Protocol list)

Major General Everhart,

Brigadier General Pereira,

Chiefs of the Air Forces in the Western African Region,

Participants and distinguished guests,

Good afternoon.

I would like to thank the government of Senegal and the Senegalese Air Force for their sponsorship of this conference. I would also like to thank each of you for taking the time to attend. We are aware that you all have many demands on your time.

We opened this conference by discussing cross-regional issues like terrorism, drug-trafficking, maritime security and other threats precisely because none of these threats is isolated to just one country. That is why the solutions to these problems cannot be tackled by a single country, either. We’ve focused on regional solutions and integration because of the great potential that exists to pool resources, like ISR -- Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance -- and strategic airlift, in North and West Africa to tackle these problems in a coordinated way. Being here, and talking together, is just one of many steps towards creating a framework for African Air Forces to work together towards common objectives. We hope you each walk away from this conference having formed new relationships and enhanced existing ones with your Air Chief counterparts.

In the discussion groups, you talked about concrete suggestions for some of the challenges of an integrated response. We look forward in the future to partnering with African countries to carry out some of the solutions coming out of this conference – within existing multilateral structures, like ECOWAS and the African Union, and by expanding many of the existing bilateral agreements that already exemplify the “best practices” of cooperation. Some of you offered potential near-term steps, like relaxing over-flight and landing restrictions, and running command post exercises to practice shared procedures.

Overarching all of these topics, we discussed the need for each Air Force to have strong advocates from both within and outside of the country, and maybe even a high-level African framework to publish advocacy papers to help galvanize African leaders to the potential of air power. We have seen signs of success: Some countries' ground forces are so aware of the necessity of air power they will no longer go on missions without their Air Force first paving their way. However, there is still a long way to go. Dramatically demonstrating the Air Force's capacity to answer the nation's security requirements can serve as a wake-up call to energize the political will to boost Air Force resources.

It has been our pleasure and privilege to gather together the strategic leaders and thinkers of your ten countries to brainstorm how we go about integrating air power in this vast region. But our time together has also helped reinforce those bonds of trust between African Air Forces that are probably the most critical link in any attempt to forge a truly regional response to regional threats. You are the ones to lead the way – to set the goals and then accomplish them. No one knows better than you what you need here in North and West Africa. We look forward to facilitating the movement towards those goals and seeing what transpires between now and our next Air Chief's Conference.

Thank you, and safe travels back home.