



**Remarks by Ambassador Lukens
University of Ziguinchor – USAID/ERA program
October 10, 2012**

(AS prepared)

[Protocol]

Thank you for welcoming me, and it is a great opportunity to visit the University of Ziguinchor. I have visited University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, but as you know, this is my first trip to the Casamance. As education is one of Senegal's most important goals, and both education and agriculture form some of the most important areas of the U.S. – Senegal partnership, it is fitting that I come here today.

Many of you have heard of Feed the Future – a flagship U.S. government program, initiated under President Obama in 2009 to help prevent hunger and create food security around the world. In Senegal, a Feed the Future target country, agribusiness is a key to obtaining national food security.

The “Agriculture Research in Education program” under USAID (known as “USAID/ERA”) is a 5-year, \$28 million project that assists 12 academic and research institutions in Senegal to improve food security and stimulate economic growth in the country. I am pleased that your university is one of those 12 institutions.

I am honored to be here today to celebrate those of you who have partnered with us in trying to achieve Senegal's vision of a hunger-free country. I have heard a bit about the USAID/ERA program, and I am particular impressed by many aspects of it.

I am impressed by the *Scholarships of Excellence* program that provides financial support for 140 students from Senegal, including funding 25 graduate degrees in the United States. This program also supports career development, entrepreneurship, English Language and preparation for advanced training.

I am also impressed by the *Femmes Transformatrices* of Ziguinchor. These are women who are transforming products, drying fish or mangoes, roasting and packaging cashews, or bottling fruit-based drinks. They turn a simple village product into a desirable commodity that can be sold in urban areas.

Agribusiness requires us to respond to the needs of the private sector and small agro-entrepreneurs. So we stand with you on research and training; we stand with you on linking to the private sector; but that is not all. We know that you have tangible needs, too – without equipment the research and training will teach you much but not allow you to truly transform your society. That is why USAID/ERA has provided each of the 12 institutions in Senegal with IT equipment to permit students and professors to work more efficiently through easier access to online information and resources. We have also provided 20 buses, pickup trucks and tractors to mobilize students and faculty to get them where they need to go in a region where public transportation is difficult.

To close, I would like to recall the recent United Nations General Assembly meeting just a couple of weeks ago in New York – where President Obama and President Sall went to meet with other world leaders to discuss the world’s most pressing problems, including hunger. Many nations’ representatives gathered to report on their countries’ progress – or challenges – in combating hunger. It was an opportunity to see where we have been, and where we still need to go. Since the launch of Feed the Future in 2009, we have made great progress on food security and nutrition in Senegal, but there is much work to be done. We will continue to look for opportunities to engage the private sector and civil society to scale up successful, innovative interventions that can help us advance our goals and achieve global food security – ones like the *Scholarships of Excellence* and the *Femmes Transformatrices* of Zinguinchor. In Senegal, we stand with you on your efforts to transform your agricultural sector into one that brings benefits for you and your fellow citizens. A healthier Senegal is good for us all.