



**Remarks
Ambassador Lewis Lukens**

**ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OPEN HOUSE
December 1, 2012 at 10:00
WARC**

Madame Ndeye Marie Gueye Fall, Presidente de l'Association de Alumni,

Dear Alumni Board and members,

Honored Guests,

It's an honor to attend the first official Alumni Association Open House -- or, *Journée des Portes Ouvertes*.

Thanks also to the West African Research Center for hosting us today, even though Dr. Sene is traveling.

When I was preparing to come to this event Saturday, my colleagues at the Public Affairs Section reminded me that I would be among friends – and indeed, I am. Alumni are very special to our Embassy and to our government and never more so than in recent years when we have come to truly appreciate your value. Although we have been running exchange programs for several decades, it was just over 10 years ago that the State Department created a special office for alumni relations. At that time, there were many questions such as:

- How can we best reach out to alumni?
- Would alumni in Africa have internet access to the website?

- Who really is an 'alumni'- only those who have gone to the United States, or anybody who has participated in one of our programs?
- Will people really feel a need to give back to their home community after a trip to the U.S.?
- And most importantly, would experience in a U.S. exchange program be enough of a unifying factor for such a group of people in a certain country – like Senegal?

Ten years later, I am proud to say that, the Alumni concept is alive and strong, thanks to members like you. You have not only answered all the hard questions, you have exceeded our expectations. Senegal's alumni association, in particular, is known in the State Department as a regional leader.

In 2010, Dakar was selected as the site to host a West African regional Alumni conference.

In 2011, The Association ran a successful series of conferences throughout Senegal called the Democracy Caravans. These events brought alumni together in five cities, and helped spread civic education concepts in advance of crucial presidential elections here.

In 2012, The Association won two grants to support development projects. One, funded by the Alumni Engagement Innovation fund, is now working to create peace networks in West Africa, and the other is helping rural women in Senegal gain skills for productive employment.

Alums here have also mentored and supported younger members and increased communication efforts. So, really, it was not the U.S. government that found the unifying factor for the group. It was the organization itself. The members of this organization are united by their commitment to civic responsibility, and I cannot think of anything more important.

Whether you are a lawyer, journalist, teacher, or professional; whether you went on a three-week International Visitor program or a year in the United States on the Fulbright program; or did *both* like

Ndeye Marie; you are all committed to using your professional skills and experience to make a difference in Senegal.

You are now taking things to the next level and using what you learned in the U.S. to ask and answer your own hard questions in Senegal about the future of democracy, unemployment, education, and development. We hope that today's Open House will serve as a platform for networking in many professional areas.

I congratulate your efforts and wish you continued success. Thank you.