



**Ambassador Lewis Lukens**

**Remarks  
2013-2014 YES Program Pre-Departure Dinner**

**CMR, Dakar  
July 31, 2013**

*(As prepared)*

His Excellency, the Minister of National Education Serigne Mbaye Thiam

Honored guests from the Ministry of National Education, partners from iEarn,

Alumni of the YES Program,

Parents and chaperones –

Thank you for joining me at my home this evening to bid our YES students *bon voyage* as they head to the United States for a year of study, personal enrichment, and cultural exchange. Already in its seventh year, the Youth Exchange and Study Program has so far sent over 60 Senegalese youth to high schools across the United States. This year, we are particularly excited to have recruited a group of students from the cities of St. Louis, Fatick, and Ziguinchor, who will represent the diversity of this great country to their classmates, teachers, and host families.

I believe that, for most of you, your YES Program year will be your first trip outside of Senegal, and certainly to the United States. Some of you may be feeling a little nervous, excited, or a mix of both – but don't worry, that's entirely natural. Even experienced diplomats who have been moving from country to country their whole lives get that feeling. But I am confident that you will find the American people to be warm and welcoming, just as they have been to the generations of immigrants that made our country what it is today.

When I compared you to diplomats earlier, that was deliberate. For many of the Americans you meet, you will be the first and maybe the only Senegalese people they have ever met – possibly even the only Africans! I encourage each of you to represent the best of what your country has to offer: its hospitality, its *joie de vivre*, its scholarship, and its history of peace and tolerance. This might seem like a complicated task, but it won't be hard to find people who are genuinely curious about the place you are from. The more you share with them about your country and its culture, the more you will learn about the United States. That eagerness to teach and to learn across cultures is really what it takes to be a diplomat.

Over the next few weeks, you will receive orientation on the YES Program, on life in the United States, and on the way things are done in your host families and your schools. Pay close attention to everything you are taught, because it will help you learn not just what to expect, but also how to get the most out of your experiences. But the most memorable parts of your year in the United States will be the unexpected friendships and moments that will be with you for the rest of your lives.

I am honored to welcome you to the United States of America, and I congratulate you on being selected for the Youth Exchange and Study Program.

Please join me in a round of applause for Senegal's YES Program class of 2013-2014!