



Chargé d’Affaires Sandra Clark

**Remarks
2013 YALI Alumni Reunion Seminar Opening Plenary**

**Hotel Pullman, Dakar
September 18, 2013, 9:00 a.m.**

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Gilmour,

Colleagues from Meridian International Center,

Members of the press,

And of course dear YALI program alumni,

On behalf of the U.S. Embassy to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, I am honored to welcome you to Dakar for the first YALI Alumni Reunion Seminar. I myself am fairly new to Senegal and have already been charmed by its people, its rich culture, its beautiful setting on the ocean, its delicious food, and what the Senegalese call “teranga” -- their special spirit of hospitality. I hope that all of you here get to enjoy many of these delights over the next few days. We are so pleased that this country and this city are hosting you, young African leaders.

As you all know, President Obama and his family recently visited Senegal, along with South Africa and Tanzania -- Their trip was dedicated to forging deep and lasting bonds between the United States and the nations and people of Africa. Central to the message, he expressed on his trip of promoting opportunity and development -- and truly, over his past four and a half years in office -- is his focus on the power and the potential of African youth. Opportunities for youth are underscored as a priority in the U.S. Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa, published by the White House last year. President Obama spoke about these while on the continent.

In a speech that he delivered in Cape Town, he reminded the 60 percent of Africans under 35 years old that “young people are going to be determining the fate of this continent” and that “the world will be watching what decisions you make.” “As President of the United States,” he said, “I believe that my own nation will benefit enormously if you reach your full potential.”

We want YALI to be the vehicle that enhances your efforts to fulfill that potential in your communities and your professional endeavors. My colleague David Gilmour from the State Department’s Bureau of

African Affairs is here to collect your advice and insight to help us make YALI the best program it can be for the approximately 500 young Africans who will participate in this year's Washington Fellowship. I also expect that Dakar will be the hub for many of your future professional endeavors and interactions with our growing network of alumni and partner organizations. We at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar and its USAID Mission look forward to supporting your future endeavors.

While I have not yet gotten a chance to meet many of the young African leaders that our Embassy here nominated, I look forward to doing so as well as Aissatou, Maimouna, Assane, Awa, and Mathilde. Like all of you, they have done great work representing Senegal and Guinea-Bissau and serve as wonderful examples of the potential of African youth. I think this seminar is a great way to bring you all together – some of you who have met before, and others who haven't. This seminar is a wonderful opportunity to have a few YALI alums, including some from southern and eastern Africa, come to meet in Dakar. This continent is an enormous and diverse continent, but I do believe it is a stronger continent when there is increased pan-African understanding and sharing.

I am here as Chargé d'Affaires because Ambassador Lewis Lukens has been out of the country. He is traveling back from the United States today. He is excited to meet all of you. On his behalf, I would like to highlight the invitation that I believe you have by now all received. You are invited to attend a reception here at the Hotel Pullman tomorrow evening to meet with our partners from the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and the Government of Senegal. Not only will it be an excellent opportunity for you to build your professional network, but it will also show our partners the high caliber individuals that we aim to recruit for the YALI 2014 Fellowship. You will help us encourage them to put forward their best candidates for this year's program, and to provide mentorship, internships, and career opportunities for YALI alumni after they return from the United States next year.

Once again, thank you for coming, and enjoy your stay in Senegal!

It is now my pleasure to turn it over to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Gilmour.