

**Remarks for Ambassador Lukens
At the Inauguration of Linguère Middle School Supported by USAID
January 21, 2014**

(As prepared)

Honorable Minister
Representatives of National and Regional Services
Representatives of the parent/teacher councils
People of Linguère
Honored Guests

Salaam Aleykum –

The United States is proud to be a partner with Senegal as it works to increase access to schools and improve the quality of education for every child.

Each one of us here today understands the importance of education. Whether in the formal or informal sector, education is an essential building block in every child's life and for every nation's peace, development and prosperity.

Over the past year, the U.S. government has supported the construction of eighteen new middle schools in Senegal, increasing the opportunity for education for thousands of boys and girls in the formal sector.

Under a unique program of U-S-A-I-D, this school was built by the Senegalese Government, under the strong leadership of the Ministry of Education, and financed by the American people. This arrangement helps the Ministry improve its system for building many more schools in the future. In fact, for every school financed by the United States, the Ministry builds a second school with its own funds.

This, and other schools like it, also could not have been built without the support of many others, including local government officials, school principals and community members.

I am thrilled to be here today at Linguère Deux Middle School, the first of these eighteen new schools to be inaugurated this year.

Construction of this school – and the opportunity it provides for more young students to continue their studies – is just one among many joint achievements that show the spirit of partnership between the United States and Senegal for more than half a century.

In the last ten years, the American Government, through U-S-A-I-D, has invested about 40 million dollars or 20 billion francs CFA for the construction and renovation of 104 middle schools, as well as training thousands of teachers.

U-S-A-I-D also helps improve the governance of middle schools and allocated thousands of scholarships to girls coming from needy families who were performing well in school but needed a helping hand.

But education, we all know, is much more than just having a place to learn. Our focus must also be on the quality of education.

Under another new program, the United States partners with the Ministry of Education to improve the reading and math competencies of more than two million students in the early primary grades, all over Senegal.

This partnership, called PALME, is implemented directly by the Ministry as part of our new emphasis on government-to-government assistance to Senegal.

Under this partnership, the Ministry trains teachers, gets reading and other instructional materials into the classrooms, improves school governance, and mobilizes communities.

In this way, the American people are helping to make sure that every Senegalese child has the chance to get the fundamental reading and math skills needed to stay in school and continue learning and succeeding all their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, this school is now yours to take pride in and to take care of. I hope everyone in the Linguère community will encourage the principal, teachers, and students to not only maintain this first-class facility, but to improve it.

By this I mean keeping every corner of it clean and in good repair, and in so doing creating an environment of respect and excellence in education.

In the end, we all want to see the children of Senegal receive the best education possible. It is everyone's collective responsibility.

The American people remain at your side as you work to provide Senegal's children with the knowledge and skills needed for a bright, healthy and productive future.

I thank you for your attention.

Jere Jef