

Remarks
Ambassador Lewis Lukens

Inauguration of Ngourane Middle School

April 8, 2014, 1:00 p.m.

(As prepared)

Honorable Minister of National Education,
Representatives of National and Regional Services,
Representatives of the parent/teacher councils,
People of Ngourane,
Members of the press, and
Honored Guests:

Asselam 'Alaikum!

It is such an honor for me to be at this school opening with you all today. The United States government is proud to support Senegal in improving the quality of education for Senegalese children.

We all agree that education is an essential piece of development, not only in every child's life but also for a family's well-being and a nation's prosperity.

This school, built by the Senegalese Government through the strong leadership of the Ministry of Education, is supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, and financed by the American people.

Many of you here today played a role in getting this school to where it is today -- including local government officials, school principals, and community members. Congratulations to you all. You are truly fulfilling the promise to expand educational opportunities for Senegal's children. I would like to give special thanks to Mr. Al Hassane Ndiaye, the construction inspector responsible for the USAID-funded schools. Mr. Ndiaye has worked tirelessly, traveling throughout Senegal, to ensure that these schools are constructed to quality standards.

It is this type of dedication, exhibited by Mr. Ndiaye and the Ministry, which helps Senegal move forward on the path towards its stated development goals.

The United States has been working with Senegal for over a half century in helping it achieve its development goals. Just in the past ten years, the United States, through USAID, has invested about 20 billion francs CFA for the construction and renovation of 104 middle schools throughout the country.

USAID has also allotted 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, means more than just having a place to learn. Our focus must also be on the quality of education.

Under another program, called PALME, the United States partners directly with the Ministry of Education to improve reading competency of more than two million students in the early primary grades, throughout Senegal.

Through this partnership, the Ministry trains teachers, gets reading and other instructional materials into the classrooms, improves school governance, and mobilizes communities. I believe our two countries share many common values and ambitions, including the reach for prosperity. As I stated at the beginning of this speech, there is little more important to a child, a family, or a nation's well-being and prosperity than education. And I mean education for all. Through this program and others that I have mentioned, the American people are helping make sure that every Senegalese child has the chance to get fundamental skills needed to stay in school and continue learning and succeeding all their lives.

Distinguished members of the Ngourane community, this school is now yours to take pride in and to take care of. I hope everyone in the Ngourane community will help maintain this facility and over time, even improve it.

I can see that the principal and community have already taken the first steps to create a clean and supportive learning environment, and I encourage you to keep up the efforts.

In conclusion, I would like you to know, Mr. Minister, officials, and people of Ngourane, that the United States remains 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. *Jërë jëf.*