



Ambassador Lewis Lukens

**Remarks
Biennale Reception**

**U.S. Embassy Atrium
Tuesday, May 13, 2014**

(As prepared)

[Salutations]

Welcome one and all to the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal! It is my great pleasure to have served as U.S. Ambassador to Dakar for two sessions of the Dak'Art Biennale, which is one of the world's best-known showcases for African and diaspora arts. This year is certainly no exception, as we welcome eight artists from the United States to participate in the official festival.

The second reason for holding a reception here during the Biennale will be obvious to those of you who have visited before. Some of you were here last year when we had our grand opening, and you probably noticed that the walls were somewhat bare. In the year since we moved into this wonderful, modern building, our colleagues in the Office of Art in Embassies have made several visits to Dakar to purchase art from Senegalese artists and install commissioned works by Americans -- such as the *pièce de résistance* by Nick Cave to my right. These works, and the mural that you can see from our balcony, will constitute the permanent collection of the U.S. Embassy for the decades to come. As the longstanding friendship between the United States and Senegal continues to flourish and grow, this collection will inspire future generations of Senegalese and American artists who visit the Embassy.

We have been joined this evening by the best and brightest of the next generation, our selections for the "Washington Fellowship" of the "Young African Leaders Initiative." The fifteen Fellows representing Senegal and two Fellows representing Guinea-Bissau were selected from over 700 applicants. Would the YALI Fellows please raise your hands? [*Pause*]

I met them yesterday, and I can attest that they are an impressive and inspiring group of young people who already play major leadership roles in business, public administration, and civil society. Their individual accomplishments are too numerous to mention, but I hope that you will take the opportunity to meet them and learn about their efforts to create a brighter future for Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Africa, and the world.

Thank you all again for coming out tonight to meet one another and to see this beautiful collection of art. I will pass the podium to Mr. Robert Soppelsa from the Office of Art in Embassies to talk briefly about the collection, and to Mr. Viyé Diba of the Visual Arts Association. Afterward, Mr. Soppelsa will lead a tour of some of the highlights of the collection. I hope that you will enjoy this opportunity to meet one another.

Jëre Jëf !