



Ambassador Marcia Bernicat

**Remarks on the Occasion of the
Celebration of the 235th Anniversary of
The Independence of the United States of America**

**Dakar, Senegal
July 4, 2011**

“Fifty Years of Freedom through Development”

The Honorable Minister of State, Minister of Mines, Industry, Agro-industry and SME,

Honorable Ministers,

Dear Colleagues and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Dear Guests, Friends and Fellow Citizens,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the 235th anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America. Most of us have forgotten just how radical were the words “unalienable rights” and “all men are created equal” when a courageous group of individuals ratified the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

In a world full of monarchies, dictatorships, and absolute rule, one small collection of immigrants from a myriad of backgrounds, creeds, and convictions, decided that the time had come to stand up for individual freedoms.

Our Founding Fathers choose, deliberately, to embark upon a political experiment: they created a government truly run “by the people” and “for the people.”

Today we celebrate the endurance of this political experiment. And we not only embrace the values institutionalized in our Declaration of Independence, we have set our course among nations truly committed to helping to ensure that everyone in the world enjoys those same “blessings of liberty.”

Fifty years ago, President John F. Kennedy understood that Americans care deeply about overcoming global poverty, hunger, illness, and injustice. When he signed into law the bills that created the Peace Corps and the U.S. Agency for International Development, he created two of our proudest American traditions, and codified our efforts to bring the blessings of liberty to the world.

Our friendship is long-standing, and as true partners, we have accomplished so much together.

For example, thanks to USAID, PC and a number of our government agencies working together, more than half of all Senegalese people now sleep under mosquito nets, which is reducing the number of malaria cases. Of the other impressive USAID achievements, it is the education program that will undoubtedly have the longest-term impact. We have worked with the Government of Senegal to complete a new middle school curriculum that is now being introduced across the country. And we have constructed 86 new schools, helping to increase middle school enrollment -- especially among girls -- from 19.65% to 45% in eight years.

With more than 230 Peace Corps volunteers spread throughout the country, Senegal now has the largest Peace Corps program in Africa. Volunteers make clean water available to villages, work with entrepreneurs to build new businesses and create jobs, and help farmers enhance their productivity. And this year, to honor, our Volunteers and their communities will plant and protect 200,000 trees across Senegal, one for every Peace Corps Volunteer who has ever served anywhere in the world.

During my three years as Ambassador, following the strong leadership of our President and Secretary of State, we have included programs in all of our efforts to fight corruption and promote good governance. Making progress in these two key areas is essential to firmly set Senegal on the path to making itself a prosperous nation and, eventually, an aid donor in the future.

As President Obama said in Ghana in July 2009, “development depends on good governance.” Every garden that a Peace Corps volunteer plants, every health clinic that USAID supports, every road that the MCC Compact funds is more likely to fail if the underlying system which supports them is subject to the corrosive effects of corruption, or hindered by a lack of transparent governance.

The Senegalese people possess a rare, proud and enduring democratic tradition that has ensured peaceful transitions of power throughout this wonderful country's history. Our commitment is to help Senegal strengthen its institutions to guarantee that tradition continues.

In 2012, both our nations will, once again, exercise our right -- and responsibility - to freely choose who will next lead us. It is incumbent upon us to show others, particularly now, as so many in the world are struggling to enjoy this same right, how free and fair elections should be conducted and how their results should be respected. The entire process must be fair and transparent for the results to be credible. The whole world is watching.

My three year assignment in Senegal is coming to a close. Since the first day I arrived in July 2008, I have experienced your famous teranga. It is hard to believe it is time to go. I will carry with me always very warm memories of all the people I have met and the experiences I have had, from Dakar to Dindéfello, from Saint-Louis to Ziguinchor.

Finally, I would like once more to congratulate USAID and Peace Corps for 50 years of extraordinary service to peace and development and all they have done to improve the lives of the Senegalese people. Thank you as well to all of the incredible staff at the U.S. Mission in Dakar. It has been an enormous privilege to work with you these past three years.

I also wish to thank our many sponsors of this event, and to urge them to put the private sector in the lead to making Senegal the prosperous country it has the potential to become.

And now, on this day marking the celebration of our nation's 235th birthday, I wish for each and every one of you health, happiness, and the blessings of liberty.

Jëre Jëf!