



**Public Affairs Officer
Kristin M. Kane
Remarks**

**Journalists' Training
Guinea-Bissau
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Thank you for welcoming me here today. I wish that I could have been with you this morning but I was unfortunately kept at work late yesterday for a program; I am happy to be here with you now, and our Embassy in Dakar is happy to support this training. As I think most of you know, the U.S. Embassy in Bissau suspended its operations during the 1998 civil war. The United States is currently represented in Bissau through a small liaison office located in the SITEC building in Bissau. In addition to an American diplomat who is responsible for relations with Guinea-Bissau, we have two Bissau-Guinean colleagues and an American Justice Sector Advisor who work at this office; soon, we hope to have a third Bissau-Guinean employee who will work under my office – the office of public diplomacy which encompasses media, culture, and education.

So we *are* here: If you want to know more about the U.S., please visit our office in Bissau, visit our American Corner at the Instituto Nacional dos Estudos e Pesquisa, check out our website in English and Portuguese, or of course visit us in Dakar if you come to Senegal.

I would also like to make a controversial point clear: Although we know that there is a desire to re-open our Embassy here, it is not in the immediate plans. That said, we continue to try to find ways to work with your government, civil society, and others on humanitarian programs.

This is my second trip to Guinea-Bissau. I came in August, just after arriving at our Embassy in Dakar, to accompany our new Ambassador for the presentation of his credentials. That trip was busy and eventful and taught me a little bit about the media in Guinea-Bissau and the challenges that you face. I also got the chance to meet Mr. Cande, and I would like to thank him for all his hard work in organizing this workshop for you.

You are here to focus on investigative journalism, with a particular focus on how to report on crimes such as drug trafficking. You do this reporting – or maybe you just think about trying to do this reporting -- in a climate where your safety could be threatened if you write certain truths. For that we salute you: There is perhaps no braver act than trying to bring truth to the masses when one's own personal safety could be under threat.

I want to focus a bit this afternoon on the idea of press freedom. I think that we all agree that a free press is an integral part of a functioning democracy. But what does a truly free press mean?

It means the ability for journalists to be able to cover their stories without interference — without obstacles being placed in their way, without fear of arrest, fear of imprisonment, fear of death.

Press freedom means being able to express yourself in whatever medium you choose without fear of repercussion.

Here in Guinea-Bissau, you play a vital role in giving a voice to civil society and to, as is said, “people on the street.” I hope that this week you will gain some tools for reporting the truth despite the challenges.

I would like to read a quote from Secretary Clinton that she said on World Press Freedom Day earlier this year in June:

“When a free media is in jeopardy, all other human rights are threatened. So in that spirit, let us continue to champion those who stand for media freedom — and let us continue to expose those who deny it. Let us work together toward a world where the free flow of information and ideas remains a powerful force for progress.”

The U.S. government, including our Embassy in Dakar, believes strongly in the importance of a free press. You each work hard every day to face the obstacles in your way. Your job is complex: helping citizens understand their rights and responsibilities; making the public aware of the problems facing the country; criticizing those who don't have the country's best interests at heart.... All this requires journalists to have knowledge, but also to exercise wisdom in deciding what to write and how to write it. That is why you are here today: to gain professional skills, to network with each other (and us, too – my colleague Ndeye Fatou Wilane and I are here over the next two days so please come talk to us), and ideally to gain confidence and more pride in what you do – sometimes considered the most heroic work of all.

We salute you, and I wish you a very good continuation of your training workshop.