

SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR DIOP

**AT THE 2009 OPENING CONVOCATION TO RECEIVE
AN HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE FOR PUBLIC
SERVICE**

CHATHAM UNIVERSITY

Pittsburgh – Pennsylvania

(August 30, 2009)

MADAM PRESIDENT E. BARAZZONE

**AMBASSADOR CYRILLE OGUIN OF BENIN NAD DEAN OF THE
ECOWAS AMBASSADORS IN WASHINGTON D.C**

AMBASSADOR AMINATA MAIGA TOURE OF NIGER

AMBASSADOR DAN SIMPSON

FACULTY MEMBERS,

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

MY FRIENDS, STUDENTS,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

**It is an honor for me to be with you today at your
Academy Opening Convocation. I would like to thank
Chatham University and its leadership for giving me**

the opportunity to speak about Mali. Furthermore, I am very humbled to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service Award from your distinguished institution.

I dedicate this degree to the Malian People and His Excellency Amadou Toumani Toure, President of the Republic of Mali who gave me the great honor to serve as Ambassador to the United States.

I would also like to dedicate this distinction to my wife Linda and my children who made great sacrifices by allowing me to do the demanding job of Ambassador.

Finally, allow me to dedicate this to my late father Mamoudou and my mother Bailo, still alive, who are

not literate but were wise enough to send me to school so that this day can arrive: a little boy from Niuro du Sahel, a small town in Mali, to receive this academic distinction from a prestigious institution here in Pittsburgh.

Let me emphasize the importance of the Global Focus program in promoting mutual understanding and friendship between US and Africa.

I have an emotional thought for millions of Africans who did not have chance to go to school and could probably be standing before you today if they were given a chance.

As a public servant, I would like to emphasize the importance of connecting with students, in order to

build and strengthen a bridge between future generations within all our nations.

Allow me to give a little information regarding my country: The Republic of Mali is a landlocked country located in West Africa and is roughly three times the size of California. Modern Mali dates back to the 11th century where it was once part of three West-African empires controlling trans-Saharan trade.

The Mali Empire occupied a territory larger than Western Europe, and was ruled by an emperor called Mansa. Stable administration throughout the state, and a chart called “*The Kouroukan Fouga Chart*” organized the empire. According to historians, this chart established social and economic reforms, including prohibitions on the maltreatment of

prisoners and slaves, established division of land and fixed exchange rates for common products.

I guess most of you have heard about Timbuktu as a city that corresponds to the end of the earth, which is a myth enrooted by popular imagination. In fact, Timbuktu does exist and is a city of Mali. It was once home to the prestigious Sankore University and was an intellectual and spiritual capital in Africa, in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Mali gained its independence from France in 1960 and since 1991, Mali has been enjoying democracy.

We have an estimated Gross Domestic Product of \$5.8 (five point eight) billion US dollars; an average growth rate of 5.1% (five point one percent); and a

per capita annual income of \$470 (four hundred and seventy US dollars).

Mali's current economic situation places it among some of the least developed countries. Its potential wealth lies in mining and the production of agricultural commodities, livestock, and fish. Agricultural activities consist of 70% (seventy percent) of Mali's labor force and provide about 40% (forty percent) of the Gross Domestic Product. Cotton, gold, and livestock make up 80 to 90% (eighty to ninety percent) of total export earnings.

Two years ago we launched a large-scale oil exploration, with a dozen of major oil companies, in the northern part of Mali. As a result, we expect Mali to join the oil producing countries by 2012.

Malian authorities have gone at great length to improve the well-being of their people, by establishing an environment that provides people with opportunities.

African countries recognize the need to work together. Because Mali is a landlocked country, we must work very closely with our neighbors, to promote a stable environment. Cooperation beyond borders promotes the regional uplifting of infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Indeed, African authorities understand that integration is crucial to the region's overall development.

I am very grateful that your university has chosen to celebrate this year as the YEAR OF WEST AFRICA. I would like to focus on one particular partnership, the

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Since 1975, the leaders of this region, realizing that we face the same challenges and have a common destiny, decided to create ECOWAS.

ECOWAS is a regional group of fifteen countries. The overall objective of ECOWAS is to promote co-operation and integration, in order to create an economic and monetary union, which encourages economic growth and development in West Africa. This vast territory of 6.1 million square kilometers has a total population of 220 million inhabitants.

In brief, the member countries would like to achieve a collective self-sufficiency, through the integration of the fifteen West African countries into an economic block, with a single market, organized

around an economic and monetary union. To that end, the following actions are envisioned: The suppression of customs duties and equivalent taxes; the establishment of a common external tariff; the harmonization of economic and financial policies; and the creation of a monetary zone. These actions will concur to establish a large market for investment, not only in its natural resources, but also in its young human resources. Important progress has been made toward achieving these goals. Still much need to be done to meet the expectations of West African people.

Regional Institutions have been established including an Executive Branch called COMMISSION, a

Parliament, Court of Justice, a Bank for Investment and Development (EBID).

Moreover, specialized agencies have been created to address keys issues. Among others, the West African Health Organization; the West African Monetary Agency; the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre, the West African Power Pool.

Remarkable changes have occurred in West Africa since ECOWAS inception. Indeed, this institution has been implementing major programs in market integration, development of physical infrastructures for roads; telecommunication and energy.

Other major initiatives have taken place, such as the construction of the trans-West African highway network, , the West African Gas Pipeline Project and the Interconnection of national electricity grids, to name a few.

The ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, has been able to set in motion ad hoc conflict resolution procedures, which have made it possible to circumscribe conflicts and crisis.

ECOWAS has also adopted a common agricultural policy, which includes livestock, fisheries, forestry and natural resource management.

These regional partnerships are improving lives of millions of citizens from many countries and are positioning ECOWAS as a major player for African Integration.

Africa have much to offer. But there are many misconceptions about business and investment in Africa. In order to brave these new endeavors, many in the United States and other places, must shift their views to a fresh outlook on the promise of African partnerships.

Let me make a point of clarification: AFRICA IS A CONTINENT NOT A COUNTRY. It houses 2,200 (two-thousand two-hundred) different dialects, near one BILLION people, and 53 (fifty-three) countries that are spread across 11,668,000 (eleven million, six-

hundred and sixty eight hundred thousand) square miles. Yet, most of the world refers to Africa as one. We work together, but we are not one. NOT YET.

Unrest in some countries should not overshadow progress in the larger parts of the continent. Economically, reforms have helped fight corruption, bring more transparency and improve business environment.

Politically, democracy and good governance are high on many African agendas. Elections are held, civil society is acquiring strength and Leaders are more and more accountable for their actions.

As our youth embarks into our modern world, we must strive to understand the challenges facing our

most valuable resources: OUR PEOPLE. Africa is the last untapped continent endowed with significant potential human resources: 50% of African population are under the age of 25.

We all recognize and value the contribution of the international community to the development of Africa.

Humanitarian Assistance is needed and helpful but not sufficient.

Development Assistance is essential to the betterment of living conditions in many African countries, but NOT ENOUGH.

What Africa truly needs is a PARTNERSHIP to develop and exploit its potential. Africa needs and

**want to be perceived as an investment opportunity
NOT only as a humanitarian threat to the rest of the
world.**

**Africa has made a big contribution to humankind.
Africa has the potential to do more. We cannot do it
alone. The rest of the world cannot do it for us. We
have the WILL and the RESPONSIBILITY to take
charge of our own destiny. Our FRIENDS can help in
the spirit of mutual respect and partnership in order
to create a WIN WIN situation for all, NOT A
DEPENDENCY.**

**The prosperity, peace and development in the rest of
the world depend on what is happening in Africa. We
all are connected for the better or the worst. Let us
work together for the BETTER.**

President Barack Obama's speech in Accra insisted on democracy, good governance, and the responsibility of each country to development. This is proof that the United States, as with many other countries, are helping to support these fresh undertakings.

I believe that it is important that academic institutions develop partnerships with their counterparts in developing countries, to help bridge the perception gap in this globally connected society.

Speaking before this audience, I cannot conclude without briefly speaking about gender issues in our country. Women are held as equals in government and law. The Malian Parliament adopted recently a

new family Code which gives more rights and protections to women.

Many leadership positions are held by women including a Minister in charge of promoting women and children in Mali.

We all recognize that the best way to promote women's rights in a sustainable manner is through GIRLS EDUCATION. Educating a girl has an impact on the entire family, community and society. This should be our commitment to women as stressed by President Barazzone.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mali and the United States share several common values have always maintained excellent relations.

We must now turn our focus on making efforts to increase broad-based growth, improve health and educational facilities, promote sustainable use of natural resources, end the spread of highly infectious diseases, encourage regional stability, build peacekeeping capabilities, establish respect for human rights, and strengthen democratic institutions in offering good governance.

Dear Students,

I invite you to be more curious, to learn more about other parts of the world. Come and experience Africa by yourselves, discover its dynamic but friendly people.

I look forward to building upon our past achievements and creating new partnerships as we move ahead. Also, I am eager to work with Chatham University – its administration, faculty, students, and other partners in the great State of Pennsylvania and the United States of America, to achieve our goals together. In doing so, we can ensure the future potentials of our next generations, here in the United States and around the world. Continue to learn from your experiences, for you are the promise of tomorrow. Congratulations on the commencement of another school year.

THANK YOU