

Awou ni sogoma ! (Good morning!)

Thank you very much Ambassador Folmsbee and Anne for your kind words and for presiding over this swearing in ceremony. I feel privileged to be serving an Ambassador, who is passionate about development, peace, and security, and who consistently supports USAID as we develop and manage programs. This goes for the whole country team. It's great to be part of such a collaborative group, working hard to support Mali and its people. And I'm reminded every day of the excellent work that Anne and our Malian and American staff at USAID do to make sure the U.S. Government provides Mali and its people the best programs we can. Programs that meet pressing needs; programs that support development, peace, and security.

If you will indulge me for a few minutes, I'd to talk briefly talk about how I got here, our programs, and our challenges ahead

Mali is a long way from the small farming town in northern Minnesota, where I grew up. Minnesota is in the north and center of the United States. The winters are extremely cold in Minnesota. And it snows. That's not the case here in Mali. And as I saw yesterday, Malians love to dance. I have to work on that.

I left my small town to get away from the cold and in search of a life that would allow me to travel and live in countries around the world. I also wanted to do work that would allow me to serve others. After graduate school, I ended up at USAID. Fortunately, I began my career at USAID working with people who had passion for development and supported me. I've had the good fortune to live and work in a number of countries, including Tunisia, Poland, Senegal, Uganda, Indonesia, and now Mali. Just prior to coming to Mali, I was at USAID/Senegal, leading programs that promote development, democracy, and resilience in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger. Mali's neighbors. I learned a great deal, and as I work with you, I hope I can apply what I learned to our activities here in Mali. I would also like to reach out to our friends and colleagues across the Sahel, and see how we can support each other. The challenges are similar. We can learn from each other.

The challenges that we are helping the Malians address are many and difficult:

- Changing climate and growing population have put extreme pressure on Malians ability to feed themselves and provide education and health services.
- Low literacy rates and lack of educational opportunities hamper economic development and service provision.
- A rapidly growing population makes it difficult to provide health and education services and economic opportunity to all citizens.
- Stalled decentralization, inadequate justice systems, and too few effective civil society organizations hamper development and efforts for peace.
- Conflict, population growth, and a changing climate increase the need for humanitarian and stabilization activities to address urgent needs, diverting energy and attention and resources from development activities.

USAID and the US Government cannot solve these problems, but we can make them smaller and improve life for many Malians. As the Mission Director of USAID/Mali, I ask that you join us in our work with our Malian partners to:

- Promote more environmentally sustainable agriculture and more effective private sector participation in agriculture.

- Ensuring that out of school children have an opportunity to return to school and that the education system provides quality education to all children.
- Strengthening of health systems to provide better maternal and child health care, reductions in malaria, and healthy family sizes.
- Improved decentralization and local government management, improve service delivery, and address local grievances about government neglect.
- Enhance humanitarian and stabilization programs to meet urgent need and promote peace and stability so that development can take place.
- Work closely with our Program Office, our Executive Office, our Procurement Office, and our Financial Management Office, which all play a vital role in supporting USAID efforts in Mali.

Before I came to Mali, I spent a good deal of time talking to a large number friends and colleagues who were Peace Corps Volunteers in Mali or spent time living and working here. All of them told me about how wonderful Mali is and how wonderful the Malian people are. They were right about that. Most of them lived here in more peaceful and happier times. My hope is that the efforts of USAID and the US Government, working closely with the people of Mali, can bring Mali back to more peaceful and happier times. I will devote my time and energy working with you to achieve these goals.

Finally, I would also like to thank my family, who unfortunately could not join me here. My wife Insaf and my sons Elliott and Yanees. They have made sacrifices so that I could come here. I appreciate their sacrifices greatly. Unfortunately, my sons will not be able to visit. They would have enjoyed themselves here, especially playing in the soccer games. Insaf hopes come once our sons are settled in school. As a Tunisian, she feels in many ways at home here in Mali. I thank my wife and sons for their support and encouragement. I hope that some day they will get to meet you all.

I'd also like to extend a big thanks to everyone who came today. I appreciate the time you took out of your busy schedules to join me for this ceremony.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who worked on organizing this ceremony. A lot of planning and effort went it, and I really appreciate your efforts.

Allah kan kan be (May God help us to understand each other),

bolo koni dén kélén tè bèlè ta (one finger alone cannot lift a stone)