

**Remarks During a Meeting With African Judicial Leaders in Dakar, Senegal**  
*June 27, 2013*

*The President.* Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chief Justice, for your service here in Senegal, for your powerful words about the work that brings us here together: the recognition that strong democracies depend on strong institutions. And that includes an independent judiciary system and respect for the rule of law.

I have to say that it's a great honor to be with such a distinguished group of justices from across Africa. Some of you may know, I am a lawyer myself. My grandmother very much wanted me to be a judge instead of going into politics, so even though I disappointed her by going into politics, at least now she knows that a group of judges are willing to meet with me even if I'm not one myself. So she would be happy about that.

First and foremost, this is an opportunity for me to salute the fine work that all of you are doing. These men and women, and the institutions that they represent are known for their integrity, their determination to deliver justice fairly, sometimes in the face of threats and sometimes in the face of intimidation. But they understand that what makes for a strong democracy includes a strong judiciary: one that's independent from politics; one that operates transparently so that citizens can have confidence that the process is free from undue influences; accountability, because even judges are not above the law.

And of course, on a much more basic level, judicial systems need funding to do their jobs. So I wanted to have this meeting here as part of my first full day in Africa on this trip because I believe that the rule of law is a foundation for governance and also a foundation for human rights and economic growth. It's a pillar of our democracy.

Societies are stronger and more stable when there are checks and balances on government power, when citizens know that their rights will be protected from arbitrary or capricious actions, when they have peaceful recourse when they've been on the receiving end of injustice.

Rule of law is what upholds universal human rights. Sometimes, when nobody else will, a judge can stand up on behalf of someone. And in the United States, one of the basic principles that we strongly believe in is, is that the judiciary is most important when it comes to minority rights because the political process oftentimes will recognize the desires of the majority. The question is, when people are on the unpopular side of an issue or a member of a minority group, where can they seek recourse? And oftentimes, it's in the courts.

So at our—at their best, our courts are venues where justice and equality can be realized for women and children and the poor, for marginalized groups, for victims of discrimination, victims of violence. But as I mentioned earlier, I think it's also a critical ingredient for economic development and prosperity in Africa.

I mentioned to President Sall of Senegal, who I was visiting with before I came here, that trade and investment around the world increasingly flows to places where there are rules and regulations that are fair and predictable, where assets and intellectual property are protected. And the courts play a vital role in that process.

So I wanted to have this meeting to hear from you about how we can be helpful and encouraging in building even stronger judiciaries and systems of law around the continent. The

United States is proud to work with partners across Africa to strengthen independent judiciaries and help prepare future jurists. So I want to hear your thoughts, your challenges, and I want to hear from you how you think the United States can be most helpful in continuing the work that you were already doing.

So again, thank you for your hospitality, Mr. Chief Justice. Thanks to all of you who have, in some cases, traveled from a very long way to be here, and with that, let me give the press a moment to depart so we can have a good conversation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:08 p.m. at La Cour Supreme. In his remarks, he referred to Chief Justice Papa Oumar Sakho of Senegal.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Senegal, African judicial leaders, meeting with President Obama in Dakar.

*Locations:* Dakar, Senegal.

*Names:* Sakho, Papa Oumar; Sall, Macky.

*Subjects:* Africa : Democracy efforts; Africa : International trade and investment; Africa : Judicial leaders, meeting with President Obama in Dakar, Senegal; Africa : Relations with U.S.; Civil rights : Minorities :: Minority rights and ethnic tolerance; Developing countries : Democratic governance and rule of law; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Open government and transparency, promotion efforts; Senegal : Chief Justice; Senegal : President; Senegal : President Obama's visit.

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