



REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR MAMAN S. SIDIKOU BEFORE PRESIDENT OBAMA

It is with a sense of great honor and a deep feeling of humility that I stand before you as the representative of the Republic of Niger to the United States of America.

My task is straightforward: it is to **consolidate the ties and deepen the cooperation between the peoples of Niger and the United States** – a matter that my President had the singular privilege of discussing with you earlier this year.

That task is made much easier by the warmth of your personal relationship with the democratically elected President of Niger. President Mahamadou himself, Assistant secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and your very able Ambassador in Niger, Ms. Bisa Williams, have all testified to this very genial relationship.

Mr. President, I myself spent close to nine years of my life in America as a graduate student in Texas and Florida and as a technical staff person at the World Bank in Washington. I return today in a different capacity at a time when my beloved Niger is faced with daunting challenges – challenges that your administration is monitoring very closely, given the high stakes for world security in our region.

The mission that President Mahamadou assigned me is to nurture the sort of **strategic dialogue** between our two nations that will help achieve in Niger the priorities that we share:

- Building strong institutions, good governance and sustainable political stability;
- Directly addressing the ills of poverty, inequality, hunger and disease ;
- Relentlessly combating the scourge of intolerance and terrorism;
- Developing strong and productive forms of cooperation in trade; and

- Bringing the people of our two nations more closely together through collaboration and exchange of knowledge and research as has been exemplarily modeled by USAID .

Your Excellency, our own President Issoufou Mahamadou firmly believes that these goals can be achieved and that we are now blessed with a golden opportunity to do so, in a time when the United States of America is attentively listening to Africa and Niger is actively building a Democracy based on the Rule of Law.

Mister President, I assume my own duties with the conviction that we can create a truly transformational partnership between the United States and Niger – built on the alliance between our nations that was first established nearly fifty years ago under President John F. Kennedy and has stood the test of time. Our partnership has endured because it was founded from the outset on a vision of international cooperation as a bridge between peoples.

Generations of Peace Corps Volunteers -- who have moreover been the best ambassadors of the United States in Niger and among the best friends of Niger in the USA -- would certainly bear testimony to that fact. In fact, some US Peace Corps Volunteers taught me English in my high school days in Niger and – returned former volunteers in academic garb – guided my PhD research at Florida State University here in the United States.

Mr. President, security is a dire concern in our region of the Sahel where the foes of liberty are hard at work. We in Niger will face squarely the challenge, I can assure you, but we need the support of our friends – particularly the United States of America -- to do it as effectively as possible. These are times when the partisans of peace must show their resolve in the face of those who have chosen to kill innocent people and destroy communities. In the environment that these enemies could create, human development would be the first casualty, for security and sustainable development are inextricably linked.

At the same time, lack of human development may itself be a major factor in creating insecurity. As we say in the Hausa language of Niger, *Abin da ya ka'da kusu wuta, ya hi wuta zahi*. In short, “Whatever caused the mouse to run into the fire must be hotter than fire itself.” Addressing the conditions that push people toward the fire must also be one of our priorities.

Mr. President, thanks to your personal involvement, Niger is back within the group of nations that are beneficiaries of the African Growth and Opportunities Act... Such advocacy and support demonstrate what we call “true friendship” in the Sahel, and they also constitute an open recognition that Niger is on the right track and that it has rejoined the concert of democratic nations after the tribulations of its recent past. Several key commitments of our current government further confirm this transformation:

- First, though the odds are numerous, our government is making every effort to ensure improvements in the key indicators of the MCC with renewed focus on good governance, human capital development and economic freedom. Niger’s current authorities are *determined* to speed up progress in these critical areas and achieve scores that would position us in the group of the Compact.
- Next, Niger pledges, with your support, to embrace and help implement Feed the Future – the global hunger and food security initiative undertaken by the United States government. In fact, President Mahamadou has already echoed the same concern by launching the “3 N” program: “Nigériens Feed Nigériens.”
- Third, our country will work to promote constructive dialogue on energy and mining with counterparts from your Administration and from the private sector.
- Lastly, the democratically elected government of Niger has given high priority to educating our citizens and counts on your Administration to support this renewed drive for sustainable career and technical skills development, improved schooling and widespread learning.

Mr. President, please allow me to conclude these remarks by expressing once again the joy and hope that I feel upon accepting the assignment to represent my country in the United States at a time of such challenge, opportunity and pervasive goodwill between our two nations.

Kindly permit me to present you with my letter of credence and the letter of recall of my predecessor.