

Senegal

Diouf Gives Independence Anniversary Address

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[Speech by President Abdou Diouf on the occasion of Senegal's 32d independence anniversary on 3 April; place not given—recorded]

[Text] Measures will be taken very shortly to ensure a broader popular participation. If the National Assembly agrees, the first of these measures will touch on decentralization. It will mean making this policy a qualitative and consistent achievement through institutional regional reform. In fact, to be able to play its full role, a region must have greater autonomy and freedom in its administration and in the management of its own affairs. This is why I would like to suggest that regions be upgraded into territorial communities which are legal entities with financial autonomy, with an assembly elected by direct universal suffrage. Such a change of status will contribute irreversibly to the region's emancipation, giving it a foundation for regional development in the context of national unity. Similarly, direct and universal election of the regional council, i.e., the working assembly, will give the region the political instrument for an autonomous management of local problems. This council will be charged with the administration of the region in fields such as education, health, and culture. It will also be charged with the management of some collective equipment. In this way, local problems will be better managed.

Furthermore, the region, which is promoted to the full rank of territorial community, will have a major role to play in planning and administration of territory in order to help strengthen its economic, social, and cultural life; that is, it will be taken in adequacy with the demands of the development effort, thanks to the expansion of its field of operation and to the strengthening of its resources. The success of this institutional evolution depends on us all, particularly on the political willingness of all those who participate in the policy formulation exercise. But it also depends on the quality of the men and women who will effect them. It calls on citizens who are at the same time conscious of the challenges of the modern world and who are ready to meet them. It therefore commands us to pursue our efforts in order to improve upon our educational system. After having said on other occasions that this educational system also means informal education, I would today like to put emphasis on the place that higher education occupies in our life. Such a structure essentially ensures the training of the cadres we need. It is at the same time responsible for fundamental and applied research without which no durable development can be achieved.

But, we must admit that our higher educational system does not as yet respond to all our needs. Even the university is in a situation which calls for the search for solutions adaptable to our realities as developing African and Sahel societies.

Certainly, over the past few years, great efforts were made in this sector and the measures needed by our entire educational system for the training and development of human resources are being realized. However, taking into account the particularity of the university, it is urgent to undertake an appropriate examination of its functioning, difficulties, needs, and aims. Also, it has been decided to hold national consultations on this topic as soon as possible under the supervision of a moderator with widely acknowledged merits and charisma. The modalities of this meeting will be made known to all, first by the competent authorities, and later, among themselves, by the participants during their deliberations. As I can see, in order to fully attain these objectives, this consultation must be guided by the following principles: realism; a sense of general interest; a search for solutions agreed upon by consensus; and participation of representatives of the nonpolitical population, workers, the trade unions, and political parties. I urge persons, groups, and institutions concerned by this consultation to resolutely contribute to its success by putting forward their ideas, offering their skills, and displaying their sense of civic responsibility to render our university system capable of contributing meaningfully to national development.

There is something still better we can propose in the field of education: communication, a vital sector in a democratic system. In this regard, we have a gain of utmost importance, which is the creation of the High Council of the Radio and Television. We have to preserve and consolidate it. But we have to still go farther because it is not enough to promote political pluralism in the media. We must also fundamentally give ourselves the means to more fully take charge of the concerns and expectations of all the components of the Senegalese society.

This shows a greater need for reflection on the stakes and challenges that media-dominated civilization poses, as well as the advantages and real risks of cultural and social standardization it brings. In the face of these certain priorities, our first enemy will be ultra-conservatism. If we want to move with the next century, we must in this field reconcile the virtues of bravery and creative imagination.

I have done research to rapidly achieve a more distinct diversification of the Senegalese audiovisual landscape. I am speaking particularly about the setting up of a private national radio and television station, for example in the field of frequency protection contract. This station will work alongside public radio and television networks with increased means of course.

Our democratic progress will, however, be incomplete if we do not also consolidate our law-abiding state. Can we

feel proud of having maintained for almost a quarter of a century a strong and independent justice? Our legal traditions are alive and among the best in Africa. But institutions are like human beings. Those which want to avoid being worn out with time must know how to renew and adapt themselves. I therefore think the time has come to expand the role of our legal system. A complete judicial reform will ensure a stronger guarantee of the effective exercise of rights and freedoms contained in the Constitution and the abolishment of exceptional court jurisdiction, beginning with the state security court, and reinforce the inspection of the administration by judges. The modernization of the state depends on this measure.

Above all, let us enable businessmen and investors to find in our country the environment of legal security that they need so much in order to develop their enterprises and offer jobs free from hazards and improvised measures.

The reform I am praying for and which will contribute to improving freedom and better dispensation of justice does not imply new state expenditure. The backbone of this reform is the reinforcement of magistrates' independence, without which nothing will be possible. Thus, members of the Superior Council of Magistrates, whose powers will be enlarged, will in future be made up of representatives freely elected by the magistrates. By acting in this way, we will clearly show our willingness to consolidate the equality of all before the law, which is one of the main foundations of democracy.

Senegalese, these measures seem necessary to me if we want to be abreast of our time and one of those responsible for ushering in a peaceful era in a new world.