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Senegalese Youth to Receive Leadership Awards

Middle School Student Competitors from Casamance Region Honored for Essays on Leadership

Washington, D.C. – On Friday, June 26, 2009, the Hon. Kalidou Diallo, Senegal's Minister of Education, Pre-School, Elementary and Middle School, Kevin Mullally, Mission Director, USAID/Senegal, and others, will honor 40 middle-school students who were among 80 participants in a Youth Leadership Essay Competition held at 20 schools and conducted by Leadership Africa USA.

Nine essay contest winners will be presented with gifts from Microsoft. A spokesman for the company called Leadership Africa USA's student essay competition "a powerful platform for students to voice their opinions on what entails positive and effective leadership in their communities and countries."

The Casamance essay contest is part of Leadership Africa USA's *Initiative to Empower Casamance Youth through Leadership towards Reconciliation*. The initiative is supported by USAID's Africa Education Initiative (AEI), Senegal's Ministry of Education, the University of Ziguinchor, teachers, community leaders and local government officials.

The award ceremony, will take place from 9:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at the Kadiandoumagne Hotel in Ziguinchor. Also attending will be Mme. Tacko Daffé, President of the Fédération des Associations Féminines du Sénégal; Walker A. Williams, President, and Shehnaz Rangwala, Program Director, Leadership Africa USA; Mamadou Thiaw, Principal of Saré Bidji Middle School, Kolda, and Daouda Guéye, Principal of Coubalan Middle School and a consultant to Leadership Africa USA.

The nine winners are: Elhadj Aliou Baldé and Aminata Dramé from Kolda; Ouneissima Alice Noelli Manga and Vincent Mendy from Kafountine; Awa Ba and Mame Ibrahima Diedhiou from Bignona; Justin Albert Mendy from Ziguinchor; Salimata Ibrahima Diatta from Sedhiou; and Antoine Basse from Oussouye.

Live coverage of the event will be provided by Sud de FM, a private radio station in the Casamance region.

The student essay contest in Senegal was preceded by a three-day workshop for 44 middle-school principals and teachers. This was sponsored by Leadership Africa USA in partnership with Senegal's Ministry of Education and AEI. Previous Leadership Africa USA training initiatives and essay contests have taken place among university students in Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Angola, and among high school students in Liberia and Nigeria.

“We are now focusing our attention on middle-school students because this is when many young people make life-changing choices,” said Walker A. Williams, President of Leadership Africa USA. “In Senegal, the current generation of young people grew up in a culture of violence, but the potential exists for immediate change, such as breaking the tradition of student strikes by strengthening mediation skills.”

The Senegalese student essayists identified leadership qualities such as courage, honesty, the desire for positive change, and the ability to inspire and unite. They saw bad leaders as domineering, selfish and harsh. In their own school lives, the students noted abuses of power among their peers and cited the need for more education about leadership to avoid future abuses. They also identified practical needs: for a bucket of water in each classroom; for school gardens; for computers; for libraries; and for balls and jerseys that they don’t need to borrow.

Leadership Africa USA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established to address challenges facing African youth through leadership training. Its mandate is to develop a leadership curriculum and provide skills training through public-private partnerships for future African leaders. Its Youth Leadership Essay Competitions and Teacher Training workshops have served as invaluable input for the launching of Leadership Africa USA’s leadership training course currently being piloted in middle schools in Senegal’s Casamance region. The pilot currently impacts over 14,000 middle school students in the region.

The Microsoft logo, featuring the word "Microsoft" in its characteristic bold, sans-serif font.The logo for "fondation sonatel", featuring a stylized orange ampersand followed by the word "fondation" in orange and "sonatel" in green.