

AfrICANDO Opening Ceremony
Keynote of
Abdoulaye DIEYE, CEO of AIBD.SA /SENEGAL

Mr. President of the Foundation for Democracy in Africa ;
Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, in your respective roles, ranks,
and titles,

As the General Manager of Blaise Diagne International Airport SA (AIBD SA) in Senegal, I would like to express my great honor and pleasure in attending the opening of the 24th annual conference and exhibition on trade and investment between the United States and Africa, Africando 2023.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the organizer of this significant event, the Federation for Democracy in Africa (FDA), known for its commitment to promoting participatory democracy, economic growth, and sustainable development in Africa.

Your mission is to strengthen and enhance the fundamental principles of democracy, freedom, and, most importantly, integrate African democracies into the mainstream of the global economy.

You have understood that economic and social development is undoubtedly a major challenge for our democracies. Thus, all the opportunities you create contribute to reducing poverty, promoting democracy, good governance, and accelerating development in various sectors of the African economy.

In this context, public-private partnerships are essential to strengthen a country's capacity to engage in trade under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), from which our country benefits, along with Mali, Nigeria, and Benin.

The Economic Support Program in West Africa has achieved success, leading to the extension of USAID funding from 3 to 5 years. Given these accomplishments, AIBD SA is determined not to forgo the chance to introduce its projects to potential investors and partners, as well as interact with conference attendees to fortify our strategic collaborations with American partners.

AIBD is a relatively new airport, having been opened on December 7, 2017. However, it aims to establish itself as the primary sub-regional aviation hub. This goal is rooted in its strong determination to exploit the substantial investment prospects available in our nation's aviation sector.

In the aviation hub strategy, fifteen flagship projects have been identified with an estimated total budget of 435 billion CFA francs.

Among the priority projects, we can mention:

- The construction of an Maintenance Repair Overhaul Center covering an area of 10,000 square meters, designed to serve the national carrier, Air Senegal, and other international airlines ;
- The International Academy of Civil Aviation Professions (AIMAC) with two campuses, providing cutting-edge training techniques and EASA and IATA certifications. The Academy has already begun its activities, training student pilots and aeronautical maintenance technicians;
- The development of a new cargo terminal and a Center of Medical Expertise for Aviation Personnel to make the airport a hub for medical tourism.

In its phase of growth, AIBD will capitalize on its advantageous geographic location by focusing on the "passenger experience" to enhance the airport's attractiveness.

In this context, the Airport City initiative enables AIBD to utilize its 2,000-hectares land reserve for developing industrial service infrastructure in the vicinity of the airport.

AIBD SA also includes an interconnected network of 13 regional airports that have the capacity to host direct flight routes for airlines, complemented by attractive tourist attractions.

Looking ahead, a promising future is unfolding for Senegal's civil aviation through the Senegal Airports Reconstruction Program, often referred to as PRAS, and the 2021-2025 Air Hub strategy. This strategic initiative, a central component of the Emerging Senegal Plan, is characterized by its unparalleled scale and breadth.

If our country anticipates the development of national and international traffic, it is because favorable economic growth prospects, combined with the imminent and large-scale exploitation of oil and gas, will make Senegal, the gateway to West Africa, a preferred destination for foreign investors.

All the regional airport platforms targeted by this ambitious project will boost Senegal's international attractiveness, generate economic growth, and serve as a vital driver for domestic air connectivity. AIBD will be at the core of this unprecedented transformation of Senegal's skies, in line with the vision of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Macky Sall, whose commitment to the radiance and development of Senegal is intrinsic to his political engagement.

Ladies and gentlemen, for various reasons, this is why we are actively taking part in this conference and exhibition, which is proving to be a significant platform for us to present the business prospects available in the hospitable land. It goes beyond our organization and resonates on a global scale.

I extend an invitation for you to explore our booth, where you can delve further into our projects and engage in more in-depth discussions with my team. To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude once again and offer my congratulations to the FDA for their outstanding organization, and I wish every success to the conference proceedings.

Thank you for your kind attention.