7-9-2013

South Sudan Independence Day Ceremony Remarks

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Dunn, John M., "South Sudan Independence Day Ceremony Remarks" (2013). WMU President John Dunn. 582.
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• Good morning. Thank you asking me to share in this very moving celebration of your nation's independence. I am fully appreciative of the fact that, as the world's youngest nation, South Sudan is celebrating only its second Independence Day. I am honored to be with you today, and I wish for your country and its more than 8 million people many such celebrations, taking place long into the future.

• While you may be more than 7,500 miles from South Sudan, the fact that you have chosen to celebrate in this way shows me you value and honor the importance the people of South Sudan place--and have always placed--on knowing one's origin.

• The beginning of your lives and the often-perilous journeys that ultimately brought you to Western Michigan University forged you into the young people you are today. They are your origins. The lessons learned from experiences along the way have made you strong. I believe they have also given you a deep appreciation of the possibilities and the potential awaiting your young nation, and YOU as individuals.

• And those lessons have also endowed you with a keen sense of compassion and respect for all--traits sorely needed by every nation. You have seen all sides of humanity and your presence here today tells me you have chosen for yourselves the positive road of leadership, engagement and accomplishment. You have chosen to embrace your nation's new motto of "Justice, Liberty, Prosperity."
• I have always considered this University fortunate to be so close to the organizations that brought hundreds of the Lost Boys of Sudan to West Michigan--and sadly, too few of the Lost Girls as well. As an academic community, we had the opportunity to embrace you, and we took great pride in seeing the first "Lost Boy" graduate from our University in 2006 and then continue on to earn a master's degree in social work two years later.

• Some of you have carved out lives in this nation and are on your way to citizenship. But many of you recognize the challenges and opportunities in South Sudan. While you are sometimes still called Lost Boys or Girls, you know you are no longer lost. You have found yourselves as the first generation in your nation to be educated and ready to take leadership positions as your country rebuilds.

• There is much to be done, but you have the skills and the knowledge to accomplish all that needs to be done. We've taken great pride in seeing you start to achieve your dreams here. We will take even greater pride as you help your countrymen and women realize their dreams.

• You will succeed, and some day, South Sudan Independence Day will serve as a reminder to your continent and our world, that nothing can overcome a people who embrace and work to fulfill their dream of "Justice, Liberty, Prosperity."

• Just days after the Fourth of July celebrations that mark the birth of the United States, It gives me great pleasure to wish each of you a "Happy Independence Day." Thank you for inviting me to share your pride and love of country.