



FOCUS 2015

Ambassador Araud Speech

Mister and Madam Mayors, Dear participants,

It is with a great honor to welcome you here to the French Embassy, and to open the Forum of Communities for Urban Sustainability, so-called “FOCUS 2015”;

I would like in particular to thank all the representatives of American and French cities for coming to this conference to discuss, learn and share your best practice on how to make our cities more sustainable.

As you know, France will host the next major climate conference, COP21, which is expected to give rise to an international agreement.

This will be a critical moment for all of us. 196 parties will come together to discuss the biggest challenges we have faced in decades. We will need all of you – state and local officials, NGOs, businesses and academics to make COP 21 a success.

Our country will serve as an honest broker at this global event that will bring together government negotiators and civil society actors.

Cities and local governments are among the most powerful and effective players in fighting climate change. That’s why this conference, today, is for us an important step in the discussions between France and the US on the road to the Paris Conference.

Fighting climate change is also an extraordinary opportunity for local and global economies and businesses, for job creation, saving taxpayers money and increasing quality of life in urban areas. And that's what this conference is about.

Every effort we make to adapt to a low carbon production model and lifestyle will participate to those aims.

Every investment we make now in the sustainable economy will save hundreds of billions of dollars down the road in repair or rescue. It will also generate great profit for the businesses that are smart enough to take the lead, and I know there's some in this room.

The Green Embassy's challenge

I'll give you just an example, even if I don't run a city as you do, but just an Embassy.

Even at a building level, change is possible. You know, this Embassy dates from the 1970's. And it went recently (you could not tell?) through renovation. This was accomplished in a way of "greening" the Embassy, and it wasn't easy. And so, I'm proud to tell you the French Embassy has received, in June 2013 and 2014, the DC Greening Embassies Forum award from the mayor of the district of Columbia for its achievement of operating a greener and less energy consuming building.

In coordination with the District government, we have installed a 10,000-square-foot green roof to help reduce air pollution and urban heat, increase building isolation, and manage and filter storm water. In two years, electricity consumption decreased by 22% and gas consumption by 14%. Believe me, in those times of weak euro, we appreciate the substantial savings. Our new Building Automation System pays off for itself four years.

We are going to pursue our efforts to green this embassy because if you make the necessary efforts and look at the right place, you can still find out many opportunities to better adapt our production and consumption way.

I'm really amazed by the great initiatives both US as French cities are taking, and your presence here, today, means that you care about re-think how we used to build cities. With the rapid urbanization of the world population, we need innovative leaders like you to shape a better future.

There is no doubt, there is here an important opportunity for our countries to collaborate, to create synergies by sharing their ideas, initiatives and concerns, and their experiences. And France does believe in "city to city collaboration", as these collaborations are more based on concrete actions and mid and long- term solutions.

This is why your collaboration is essential. The French Embassy has been working on the French-US friendship and will continue its efforts to create the momentum for cities to Paris 2015.

And on this very crucial issue involving government negotiations, new corporate approaches, and citizen activism, you will once again demonstrate that local leaders can make a difference!

I wish you a successful conference.