

**Discours—Inauguration de l'Alliance française du Lake Champlain region
Burlington, November 5, 2015**

Mesdames et Messieurs, dear friends, good evening, and thank you all for coming.

I'm very pleased—and I must confess very moved—to be with you tonight, in Burlington, for the inauguration of the new home of the Alliance française. I just arrived in Boston two months ago as the Consul General of France. But I have already been in Burlington a long time ago. And if I may I'd like to tell you a personal story.

It was the summer of 1990, twenty five years ago. I met an American guy around my age playing guitar—he was very good—on a beach in Martha's Vineyard. We got along well and he invited me for a weeklong vacation with his girlfriend at his parent's house in Burlington. After that, he came to my place in Paris a couple of times and then—as it is often the case in life—we lost contact. But I still have in Paris the guitar he gave me, and I keep it as a symbol of the friendship between me and Burlington.

I'm also glad to be here because this inauguration means a lot for France. The Alliance française of the Lake Champlain region: such an evocative name! This evokes for us wild spaces, multicolored forests of an Indian summer, and old charming wooden houses, but also the fascinating character of Samuel de Champlain—who was born in Saintonge, more precisely in Brouage, an area I know very well because I'm partly native of it—and the incredible adventure of thousands of people coming, throughout the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, from France to find a new world and set up a “New France”! Even today, I can't imagine these people arriving for the very first time on these new shores, in these unknown lands...

That is the reason it is so important for France to have such a dynamic Alliance française in Burlington. This weekend in Boston, while I was writing my speech, I visited the website of your Alliance, and I was so encouraged by all the activities and rendezvous you organize in the fields of language, gastronomy, cinema, music, and so on. And I wanted to be with you to tell you just two words: thank you! Thanks to all of you, the French language, the French and Francophone cultures are lively and open to as many as possible.

And you are not alone. You are a member of the huge community of Alliances françaises, which is the world's largest cultural network with 850 offices in 136 countries on five continents. Each year, almost 500,000 people of all ages come to learn French in the French Alliances, and over 6 million people participate in their cultural activities. A network that keeps alive the spirit of its founders—the scientist Louis Pasteur, the diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, the writers Jules Verne and Ernest Renan, and the publisher Armand Colin—and the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity, principles shared by people of Vermont, where the motto is “Freedom and unity.”

Besides, I'd like to say that—as, day after day, you teach French and promote French culture—that supporting the Francophony is one of my priorities in New England. Here in Vermont as in Maine—where I was two weeks ago—the Francophony is vibrant. And I want to work with you to strengthen it.

I also want to boost our academic links. New England hosts some of the most prestigious universities in the world. Each year, there are around 17,000 American students who go to France and 9,000 French students who come to the States. It's a lot, but it's not enough. Together, we have to grow these numbers.

I will also continue to support the initiatives of French entrepreneurs and companies in New England, and to foster American investments in France. With my team we will especially continue to back research and technological projects and startups.

Last but not least, I'd like to remind you—because I know that it is an issue with which a lot of people in Vermont are concerned—that France will host in late November the presidency of the COP 21, the new round of negotiations on climate change. Such a challenge! We expect over 40,000 participants in Paris–Le Bourget, coming from around the world. I can assure you that France is fully involved in one of the most important negotiations of the century, and beyond. For months, France has been working on drafting a universal legally binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to limit the global temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. And the last draft—emerged from the recent discussions held in Bonn—is

encouraging. We are reasonably optimistic, and we know that we can count on the support of our American friends, and President Obama who will attend the Conference.

To conclude, I'd like to thank and congratulate Victoria Brassart Jones, President, Adrienne Coléon Gaskell, Vice President, Janice Dawley, Treasurer, Micheline Tremblay, classes coordinator, and all the other members of the board of the Alliance française, and of course, the Honorary Consul for France, Mr. Ernie Pomerleau. Bravo à vous tous.

Thank you. And now, let's all have a drink.