



A Tribute to General Lamine Cissé: An Officer and a Gentleman

In the cultural area He and I are from, when a person like General Cissé passes on, it is customary to say that ‘the world has become smaller,’ and that even “the Earth will moan and wail” as She receives him. With the passing of General Lamine Cissé, our world has indeed become smaller and, along with all of us who knew him, the Earth will mourn.

Before he became such a towering figure in everything SSR/G, General Lamine Cissé, a proud graduate of the prestigious French military academy Saint Cyr, rose to the rank of Army General, became the General Chief of the Staff of the army and then Minister of the Interior of Senegal. A distinguished career already, by any measure. As Minister of the Interior, he is credited with *the* key role in the 2000 democratic transition that took place in his country by conducting a transparent and credible electoral process, and convincing a somewhat hesitant president Abdou Diouf to accept graciously his defeat to then opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade. (A fascinating chapter of the democratic saga in Africa he testified to in his autobiographical book, *Carnets secrets d'une alternance : un soldat au cœur de la démocratie*. Paris: Gideppe, 2001. A must read that should be translated, at last). Just for this feat General Cissé surely entered the History of his country and of Africa. He went on to become one of the most consequential former high-ranking officers of his country (indeed of the continent) as heads of state throughout West Africa regularly called on him to discreetly carry out highly sensitive missions that diffused many a tense situation or advanced the cause of democracy and Human Rights.

His natural leadership and diplomatic skills were soon to be tapped by the United Nations as its Secretary General called on him to become the UNSRG in the Central African Republic and later as the UN Bureau Chief for West Africa. He became one of the most respected and beloved officials on the continent.

I first met General Cissé in 2006 when he was the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in the CAR. I was immediately struck by his generosity of spirit and his kindness. I later worked under his apt guidance in the Guinea SSR process (2009-2010), and in numerous other SSR/G collaborative efforts since, from Dakar to Washington, DC, from Conakry to Monterey, CA, to Geneva and in many other locations in between. I have witnessed first-hand his unique charm, compassion, wit, encyclopedic knowledge and legendary memory. He embodied the ‘people’s person’ cliché, with always a ready kind word or an uplifting joke. In all my interactions with him, he was reliably wise, fair, and generous.

He was unfailingly the personification of what each of us would like to see in African officers, leaders or simple citizens, that is, an untarnished reputation of honesty, unquestioned integrity, devotion to the superior interests of our people and our continent.

A family man, a devout Muslim, in the pure tradition of the "*Mandé Mory*,"* a Senegalese patriot, a statesman, an unpretentious man who comported himself in exactly the same way with heads of state or the ordinary people whom I have seen often flocked to him, General Cissé was all that and much more. Anybody who interacted with him was to quickly realize that he truly was in a league of his own.

General Cissé was a member of the ASSN for many years and, I know, truly believed in its goals. He took part enthusiastically in many of its activities and contributed immensely to the progress made toward these goals. The ASSN and its friends and allies have lost an indefatigable champion of SSR/G. He was blessed with the gravitas, the grace, the credibility, and the passion to convince the most skeptical of its antagonists on the continent. He will be irreplaceable.

It has been my privilege and honor to count myself among his friends and to have enjoyed his affection and trust. I will cherish forever the fond memories I have of our long conversations in Dakar and elsewhere while having dinner or a cup of tea. I was invariably enthralled by his unparalleled story telling skills, his sense of humor, as he recounted countless stories of recent (West) African political events in which he was an actor—for good. Always. I will always remember his delightfully mischievous ways of saving the best for next time while inserting powerful teasers, to make me beg for more. I will also remember General Cissé as the unfailingly elegantly dressed, handsome gentleman moving with the ease of nobility in any setting, with that enigmatic but reassuring smile all of which made one gentleman confide in me once that he looked "so Presidential." That is the General Cissé I knew and I will miss so much.

Yes, our world has become much smaller without General Lamine Cissé.

We bid farewell to possibly the last true "Officer and Gentleman" of his generation. He will be sorely missed.

Repose en Paix, mon Général. Nous te Saluons, noble guerrier!

Boubacar N'Diaye

* The Mandé Mory are an institutionalized (through the edicts of the 14th Century Mandé empire Kurukan Fuga Charter) erudite religious cast. This is his proud family heritage.