Two Muslim-majority Africa states to send first-ever envoys to Israel

August 4, 2017

By Raphael Ahren

The Times of Israel

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/two-muslim-states-in-africa-send-first-ever-envoys-to-israel/>

Senegal and Guinea are sending their first-ever ambassadors to Israel next week, as Israel continues to expand its outreach to Africa.

Talla Fall, of Senegal, and Amara Camara, of Guinea, are scheduled to present their respective letters of credence to President Reuven Rivlin on Tuesday at a ceremony in Jerusalem, officially taking up their positions as non-resident ambassadors to Israel. Fall, who also represents Dakar in Egypt, will be based in Cairo. Camara will work out of Paris.

Guinea and Senegal — both Muslim-majority nations in West Africa — have recently upgraded their relations with Israel. While both countries had existing diplomatic ties with the Jewish state, neither has ever appointed an ambassador to Israel.

Dakar and Jerusalem two months ago [agreed to normalize ties](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-and-senegal-mend-fences-after-un-resolution-spat/) after Israel had recalled its ambassador, following Senegal’s co-sponsorship of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 in December 2016. Jerusalem had also canceled its foreign aid programs in Senegal as part of a rash of retaliatory steps against countries that supported the measure against Israeli settlements.

On June 4, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Senegal’s President Macky Sall at a summit of West African leaders in Liberia, after which the two leaders announced the resumption of full ties. Israel returned its ambassador, Paul Hirschson, to Dakar, and Senegal vowed to back Israel’s candidacy for observer status at the African Union, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement at the time.

The leaders also agreed to advance cooperation in defense and agriculture, according to the PMO.

In February, Netanyahu had decided not to return Israel’s ambassador to Senegal, deepening the downgrading of the Jewish state’s diplomatic ties with the West African country over its support for the UN resolution.

Guinea and Israel [renewed diplomatic relations](http://www.timesofisrael.com/after-49-years-israel-renewes-diplomatic-ties-with-guinea/) in July 2016, nearly 50 years after they had been severed. The government in Conakry was the only one to sever ties with the Jewish state after the 1967 Six-Day War (several other countries cut relations with Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War).

The Republic of Guinea — not to be confused with tiny Guinea-Bissau, which is also in West Africa, and Equatorial Guinea, in Central Africa — has some 10.5 million inhabitants, 85 percent of whom are Muslim.

Under the motto “Israel is coming back to Africa and Africa is coming back to Israel,” Netanyahu has declared diplomatic outreach to Africa as one of his key foreign policy objectives. Offering African states development aid, economic cooperation, and anti-terrorism know-how, Netanyahu aims to break the traditional anti-Israel majority in international organizations such as the UN.

In the last 14 months, Netanyahu has visited the continent twice and is planning to attend a major Africa-Israel summit in Togo in October.

“Israel isn’t burdened by the past, as are many of the former colonial countries, in our discourse with African countries. Ours is a relationship of partnership,” Hirschson, Israel’s ambassador to both countries, told The Times of Israel.

“Israel and many African countries have many similarities, both in our experiences and our conditions,” he added. “We both knew slavery, exile and being refugees. We were both conquered and colonized and we regained sovereignty in modern times. We both have a small hold, family approach to farming and, as in many cases across Africa, live in and next to the desert.”

A few dozen Israeli business people live in Guinea and Senegal.

Netanyahu, during his June 4 visit to Monrovia, met with the presidents of half a dozen West African countries, including [with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92tAFS792Us), a Muslim-majority nation with which Israel does not have diplomatic relations.

Several African leaders have also visited Israel in recent months.

Earlier this week, Cape Verde announced it will [no longer vote against Israel](http://www.timesofisrael.com/cape-verde-says-it-will-no-longer-vote-against-israel-at-the-un/) at the UN.