

Good afternoon everyone,

Seyda Oumou Khayri Niasse could not attend today's award ceremony but she insisted that family members based in the region attend. Among family members present, I would like to mention Sayda Hawa Niasse, who is the junior sister of Seyda Oumou Khayri from Mauritania who postponed her return trip to attend this event. Other members of our delegation include Aboubacar Hassoumi and Tijani Hassoumi, children of Seyda Oumou Khayri, Marieme Dieng, Khadidiatou Fall and Dr Ebrima Sall former Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social and Economic Research in Africa and currently a visiting research fellow at Harvard University.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to pay tribute to Professor Pearl Robinson for her engaged scholarship and dedication to African communities. Dozens of scholars visit these communities every year. But the majority of them are just interested in collecting data and writing scholarly books and articles to promote their own career. Very few care about these communities or seek to make their scholarship benefit them. We are glad that Pr Robinson count among those very few. Last Summer, I had a long meeting with Pr Robinson and one of her students while they were planning to travel to Kiota to help the School of Mama Kiota establish a computer Lab. This is just one illustration of the dedication of Pearl to support these communities. Without your work, the Tisch College of Civil Life would not have known her. Thank you very much Pearl for all your hard work.

Seyda Oumou Khayri Niasse known as Mama Kiota is a daughter of Cheikh Ibrahim Niasse (1900-1975) a towering figure of African Islam. Shaykh Ibrahim's following runs in the tens of millions. They are found in the entire Saharo-Sahelian Belt of the African Continent from Senegal as far west as you can get in Africa all the way to the Republic of Sudan in East Africa. They are also found in Europe, in Asia and in the Americas.

All the children of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (male and female) are well educated in Arabic and Islamic studies. Many of his daughters have set up educational networks attracting students from all parts of Africa and beyond the African continent. Mama Kiota whose work we are celebrating today is one of the most prominent teachers of West Africa. She left her native Senegal to settle in Niger in the early 1960s. In the last fifty years, she made a major contribution to education and female empowerment.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank the selection committee of the Global Humanitarian Citizen award for selecting Seyda Oumou Khayri Niasse as the inaugural recipient of this prestigious award. This is a great honor not just for Seyda Oumou Khayri, her thousands of disciples and her family, but also for Africa and for all women, who like her, are working tirelessly to improve the conditions of living of their communities and to promote peace.

Thank you for your attention,

Ousmane Kane

Alwaleed Professor of Contemporary Islamic Religion and Society at Harvard University and nephew of Seyda Oumou Khayri Niasse