



Keynote Address: Dr. Mamadou Baro

From the Fuuta to the Future: A Journey of Hope and Resilience

Salam Aleykougum,

Good evening, distinguished GBA members, dedicated parents, and most importantly — to you, our extraordinary graduates,

Congratulations & “Almadou Lillah, Rab Al Aalamine”

Today, we are gathered to celebrate your success — but also to witness a moment that holds far greater meaning. Today is not only the end of one journey; it is the beginning of a legacy. A legacy shaped by determination, pride, and the unyielding belief that who you are and where you come from are sources of strength, not barriers.

Many of you are the children of immigrants. Your parents crossed oceans and borders, not for comfort, but for conviction — for the belief that you, their children, could dream freely and achieve boldly. They brought with them their cultures, customs, and silent sacrifices. They often worked jobs that asked too much and gave too little — so that you could walk into a classroom, raise your hand, and speak a new future into existence.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, *“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”* Your families took that first step. You climbed the stairs they could only imagine. You studied, you hustled, you excelled — even when the odds were not built for you to win. And today, you stand not just as graduates, but as proof.

You are proof that the child of a Mauritanian farmer, a Sahelian trader, or a Senegal River Valley artisan can rise in any room — not just to belong, but to lead.

Let us also take a moment to remember what the Sahel and Africa have already given the world. Long before colonial maps were drawn, Africa was the cradle of humanity and the birthplace of innovation. It was on African soil that humanity took its first steps. African civilizations built empires, universities, libraries, and trade networks that predate much of Europe’s written history. From the mathematical genius of ancient Egypt to the architectural marvels of Great Zimbabwe, from the libraries of Timbuktu to the philosophies of Ethiopia and the scientific knowledge embedded in indigenous traditions — Africa has shaped world civilization in ways too often forgotten or erased. You, graduates, are heirs to that legacy.

And many of you come from a region with a particularly rich legacy — **the Fuuta**, a land of scholars, poets, resistance leaders, and deeply rooted values. From the Fuuta Toro to the Fuuta Jallon, this region has long been a beacon of Islamic scholarship, oral knowledge, and social organization. It has given rise to towering intellectual figures and spiritual leaders who built systems of education and justice long before colonial administrations arrived.

The Fuuta is not only a place of origin — it is a source of wisdom, dignity, and cultural pride. To be of Fuuta is to carry in your bones the rhythm of Pulaar, the discipline of learning, the legacy of Cheikh Souleymane Ball, the resilience of resistance, and the quiet power of spiritual depth. Cheikh Souleymane

Ball was a foundational figure in West African political thought, known for advocating justice, social responsibility, and the ethical foundations of governance well before modern Western constitutions took form.

All that rich that rich heritage walks with you now.

But let me be clear: your journey does not end here. You are more than recipients of opportunity — you are key agents of change.

You stand at a crossroads between continents. You carry within you the resilience of your African roots and the power of your global education. That makes you rare — and necessary. Africa and the World need your voice, your vision, and your values.

Africa, the mother continent, is rising — in creativity, in entrepreneurship, in science, and in spirit. But it needs leaders who can bridge worlds. Leaders who understand tradition but think beyond borders. Leaders who will not abandon the continent, but reimagine it — through innovation, justice, and courage.

You are those leaders.

Whether you become doctors, engineers, educators, artists, or diplomats — remember this: you are not only making a name for yourselves. You are shaping the future of entire communities — from Cincinnati to Nouakchott, from Phoenix to Dakar, from Washington to the banks of the Senegal River.

And in a world that often questions the value of African traditions, values and dignity, your excellence is a form of resistance. Your success is a model for your brothers and sisters. Your resilience is power.

So walk forward with great pride. Not just because you've earned this moment — but because you carry so many with you: your parents, your ancestors who are no longer in this world, your neighborhoods, your homelands. Walk forward knowing that your life is a bridge — and across that bridge will walk generations.

Dr. King reminded us that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. And today, with your presence, your persistence, and your promise — you are helping to bend it.

And let us remember another towering figure who showed the world the meaning of dignity under fire — Nelson Mandela. A man who spent 27 years in prison and still emerged without bitterness, who taught us that *"It always seems impossible until it is done."* Mandela reminded the world that resilience is not the absence of struggle, but the refusal to be broken by it. Like him, you are stepping into a world where your courage will often be tested — but you must remember that your purpose is greater than your pain, and your destiny is larger than your doubts. You carry the spirit of Mandela when you forgive without forgetting, lead without dominating, and dream without fear.

Congratulations, Class of 2025. Go change the world — and never forget where you come from, because that is where your greatest strength begins.

Thank you and always keep hope alive. Allah jaarama, one jaarama.