

Thomas Jefferson University Building Inauguration

The Remarks of Former French Supreme Court Justice Noëlle Lenoir

February 8, 2013

It is a great honor to be here today with you in such respected company. Not so many lawyers in the world, especially French lawyers, have had the privilege that I am enjoying today to share the floor with such a highly esteemed colleague as Justice Ginsburg.

Let's **first** talk of this magnificent architecture that we are inaugurating. It is not only a fascinating creation, but in my view, it also and first and foremost illustrates the great role played by American Universities in this country, and attests to the fact that they attract so many foreign students from all parts of the world. I am convinced that for young students the structures and esthetics of such a place contribute to the consolidation of two things:

- the effort made in education in order to value students, who sometimes have to make great sacrifices in order to have the possibility to advance;
- a demonstration of what kind of efforts are done enabling the bringing together of faculty and students in a sense of truly real community.

And the building(s) at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law is very much illustrative of these two assets.

Second, I would like to render homage to my great friend Susan Tiefenbrun whose career pays tribute to the ability of women to adapt and advance in a changing world. As you know Susan was a distinguished professor of French literature in the first phase of her professional career. And then, she became a prominent law professor in the second phase. Such prowess, I have to admit, is very rare in France. There is another reason why I sing her praises: years ago, she created a summer course in the south of France – at the University of Nice – which is a great success. I would say that it is very chic, pardon my French, thanks to Susan, with the most highly esteemed French and US Justices gathering to exchange ideas together and with students, as well as through the

lectures given by such justices . And of course, during these summer sessions, Justice Ginsburg is the star of the show!

Lastly, I would like to express my supreme admiration for Justice Ginsburg who was my first physical contact with the real members of the US Supreme Court. As a student and then as a lawyer, I was told about this Court and I knew in particular of Roe v/Wade. But at that time I had not anticipated that I should one day discuss such issues with the Justices of this Court.

I will never forget Ruth's warm welcome some 20 years ago at the Supreme Court building. A year before I had been appointed a member of the French Constitutional court and we had a very interesting exchange of views on recent case-law. I immediately felt in the presence of someone with a vision of her role as strong supporter of American democracy. I must say that during my mandate – limited to 9 years as it is in France – this first contact was a constant inspiration. For it reinforced my belief that constitutional law has not only to do with law in its capacity to settle conflicts, but also and essentially with values such as freedom, equality of rights and solidarity.

Mr. Dean, let me **conclude** by thanking you for your invitation and congratulating you for this building which is a marvelous work of art as well as a very functional structure dedicated to making academics and students even happier through living in the same educational community.