

Statement of Pamela L. White
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of The Gambia
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 22, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I wish to express my gratitude to the President and Secretary of State for the trust and confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia. I want to recognize my family, who are here to support me, as they always have done throughout my career.

As a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon and for the last 30 years at the U.S. Agency for International Development, I have enjoyed assignments which provided me the chance to serve extensively throughout Africa and to work closely with the interagency and international donor community. If confirmed, I believe the depth and diversity of this service have prepared me well in carrying out responsibilities of a U.S. Ambassador.

Known best to us as the land of Alex Haley's groundbreaking novel, *Roots*, The Gambia has a rich and remarkable history. A diverse set of linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups have coexisted with minimum tension

in its 45 years of independence from the United Kingdom. Notably, The Gambia has taken significant steps to address trafficking in persons through enforcement of legislation and the rescue and rehabilitation of victims. Despite some shortcomings, the past two presidential and parliamentary elections were judged free and fair. Continued engagement with Gambian authorities on human rights--especially press freedom and civil liberties--will constitute a central piece of our bilateral relationship. We will watch the 2011 electoral process closely and do what we can to support credible, independent media and political parties, as well as democratic practices.

The Gambia, a very moderate majority-Muslim nation, has cooperated on counter-terrorism and played a positive role in regional security and counter narcotics. The Gambia contributes over 425 peacekeepers to five U.N. Missions; 350 of them are in Darfur. Last June, Gambian officials worked with British counterparts in confiscating an African record two tons of cocaine worth \$1 billion, and Banjul now is prosecuting the twelve traffickers. A series of subsequent drug seizures indicates President Jammeh appears to be serious about eradicating the scourge of various narcotics. Sustaining these efforts is another important focus of our diplomacy.

The U.S. Embassy also must continue to work with the government and private sector to facilitate the tourism industry and the ports, exports of seafood, textiles and garments and other commodities to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. If confirmed, I hope also to bring my thirty-plus years of development experience and contacts to help The Gambia meet Millennium Development Goals for health and education.

U.S. staffing in Banjul consists of no more than twenty Embassy officials, but The Gambia has benefited from an active Peace Corps presence since 1967. With 100 volunteers in country, the Peace Corps is the central component of our diplomacy and U.S. development assistance. If confirmed, I would make my top concern the safety and security of about 600 American citizens in The Gambia, half of whom at any time are tourists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to appear today. I would be pleased to respond to your questions.