

**Statement of Eric Kneedler**  
**Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**March 1, 2023**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is a tremendous honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence and trust, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with the committee and other Members of Congress to strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both of our countries.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to thank my wife Kristin, who is also a U.S. diplomat, for her unwavering support and partnership throughout our Foreign Service journey. It has been a true team effort from the beginning. I would also like to thank our son Toren and daughter Ella for weathering the many moves and disruptions to their lives mostly with good humor and a sense of adventure. I also want to thank my parents Dick and Suzette, who are tuning in from Florida, and taught me the importance of hard work and public service. I'd like to thank my sister Rebecca as well, who is watching in Arkansas, in addition to my Aunt Rebecca. I am also grateful for the support of friends across the country and around the globe. And to the many State Department colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of serving, particularly locally employed staff friends who keep our missions running - thank you.

As this committee is well-aware, this is an important moment in our relationship with Rwanda. There are significant ways in which U.S. and Rwandan policy views diverge. As Secretary Blinken noted during his visit to Kigali last year, the United States has concerns about the human rights climate in Rwanda and believes citizens in every country should be able to express their views without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence, or any other forms of repression. I would like to underscore that support for democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law remain cornerstones of U.S. policy in Rwanda. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to promote freedom of expression, democratic governance, and access to justice, just as I have done at every stop of my 24-year career, including most recently as the Chargé d'affaires, a.i. at our Embassy in Nairobi.

Since November 2021, the violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has caused significant human suffering. We appreciate Rwanda's engagement in the Nairobi and Luanda processes and urge Rwanda and all signatories to abide by the commitments in the November 23 Luanda communiqué. Given the legacy of the Rwandan genocide, we strongly condemn anti-Rwandophone hate speech and any collaboration with armed groups which espouse genocide ideology. As we have noted publicly in various fora, however, there is evidence Rwanda has provided support to the UN- and U.S.-sanctioned M23 armed group responsible for much of the recent violence, and, consistent with the Luanda communiqué, we call for an end to that support. If confirmed, I will use every tool at my disposal to help deescalate tensions, promote respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and assist ongoing African-led mediation efforts.

At the same time, the United States and Rwanda share many global, regional and local priorities and we have a broad partnership with the people of Rwanda. If confirmed, I would work to advance our cooperation with the government and people of Rwanda in many of these areas, including global health security; the economic and commercial relationship; environmental and climate issues; and peacekeeping.

We are also now seeing the benefits of our decades of assistance helping Rwanda to strengthen its public health system. For example, Rwanda rapidly achieved one of the world's highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in part due to this longstanding assistance and the U.S. donation of over seven million vaccine doses in partnership with COVAX. In addition, the United States and Rwanda have worked together to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS. If confirmed, I look forward to building on these successes and advancing our shared health priorities.

U.S. business interests in Rwanda are also expanding, with private U.S. investment increasing in key sectors including energy, water treatment, and telecommunications. Informal university partnerships also continue to grow between our two countries, and the only American research university with a full-time faculty and operations in Africa plans to expand opportunities at its Kigali campus. Meanwhile, over 1,200 Rwandans studied in the United States during the last academic year, and 2,500 Rwandans are alumni of U.S. government sponsored exchange programs. If confirmed, I will look for ways to advance U.S. values and promote our shared interests.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.