

Statement of Richard Mills
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
March 1, 2023

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

It is an honor to appear before this committee once again as a nominee to represent the United States as one of her ambassadors. I am joined today by my wife, Leigh, who knows well the challenges of diplomatic service having served for three decades as a foreign service officer herself. I am grateful that, if I am confirmed, she will be with me in Abuja. I would also like to recognize my parents, whose influence inspired me to join the Foreign Service. Although they cannot be here with me today, they are with me in spirit.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will draw upon the experiences of my 35-year career in the foreign service.

As Chargé at Mission Canada, I sharpened my skill at coordinating policy and consistent public messaging among the many U.S. Government agencies in Canada, almost as many as operate on the ground in Nigeria. As U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, I learned how to effectively raise difficult issues—such as fighting corruption and ensuring human rights are respected—with a government that has otherwise strong ties to the United States. And in my current assignment as the Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, I see first-hand Nigeria's diplomatic heft and leading role on the world stage so I recognize the importance of ensuring Nigerians understand and support key global U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Mr. Chairman, this is a unique moment for U.S.-Nigerian relations and for Nigeria as a whole. President Buhari is stepping down after his constitutionally limited two terms and we are looking forward to the announcement of the outcome of this past weekend's elections. As Nigeria is Africa's largest democracy, we know that these elections will be watched across the continent. I am pleased that, based on preliminary reports and assessments by election monitoring groups on the ground, despite some incidents of violence and delays at certain polling stations, the voting on election day generally unfolded peacefully.

However, after this election, whichever candidate is chosen, the new government will be faced with many challenges: how to beat back the threat from ISIS, Boko

Haram, and other criminal elements in Nigeria; how to reduce intra-communal strife in the country that has claimed the lives of far too many Nigerian Muslims and Christians; and how to harness Nigeria's vast oil wealth to improve the lives of its citizens. If confirmed, I am committed to leveraging all elements of American diplomacy and foreign assistance to help Nigeria in tackling these goals.

A top U.S. priority is combatting the insecurity that plagues the Nigerian people, with nearly all the country's 36 states experiencing some level of violence. From terrorism in the northeast and elsewhere, to criminal attacks in the Niger Delta and Southeast, to piracy off the coast, crime and insecurity are nation-wide problems. If confirmed, I will continue our efforts to work with the Nigerian Government to help professionalize its security services in order to create a professional Nigerian military and police force that respect human rights, protects civilians, and holds those who commit abuses to account.

Finally, Nigeria is an important economic partner for the United States with over ten billion dollars in two-way trade between our nations. And the Nigerian economy itself—while still primarily reliant on oil—is increasingly diversified and, as the largest in Africa, offers real opportunities for mutually beneficial trade.

And yet, for all this wealth from resources and trade, too little of it makes its way down to the average Nigerian. Illegal oil bunkering and criminality in the Niger Delta region limits the ability of Nigeria to benefit from its natural resources. And endemic corruption throughout the country further limits the ability of all Nigerians to profit from their nation's wealth. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Nigerian Government to tackle corruption and improve the rule of law. Additionally, I look forward to leveraging the ingenuity of the American private sector, as well as our Nigerian diaspora community in the United States, to continue to improve the economic relationship between our two countries.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, when I appeared before this committee eight years ago to be confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, I committed to working with Committee members to advance American interests overseas. I renew that commitment today to you and your staffs.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.