

**Opening Statement of Ambassador Troy Fitrell
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 9, 2024**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles. I am proud to have my family here today, with my wife Kathryn, a fellow Foreign Service Officer, and my children Madeleine and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service as well, including visits to the Seychelles.

In June of last year, 2023, we reopened an embassy in Seychelles after shuttering it in 1996. If confirmed, I would be the first Ambassador-in-residence in Victoria in 28 years, the role having been performed in the interim by the person credentialed to and residing in Mauritius. I previously had the honor to be that person in Mauritius. While we had significant successes in our bilateral relationship at that time, both sides were keenly aware that the absence of a resident ambassador in the Seychelles was an opportunity cost for what we could achieve together. If confirmed, it would be the honor of my career to reestablish the position.

Seychelles holds an important place in the Indian Ocean, astride some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and the bilateral relationship between our two nations is built on a foundation of shared values, mutual respect, and a commitment to fostering peace, stability, and prosperity. If confirmed, my top priority would be the safety and security of the American citizens that make their way to the Seychelles, but I would also act energetically to promote our other national interests.

In 2020, Seychelles held free and fair elections and power peacefully transitioned to an opposition party for the first time since independence 46 years ago. This showed the world that the Seychellois are fiercely committed to democracy and, if confirmed, I would work tirelessly with them to solidify their democratic institutions.

The United States and the Seychelles have a long-standing and significant security relationship. Whether countering piracy off the Horn of Africa or fighting the scourge of illicit narcotics trafficking that plagues the region, Seychelles understands the stakes and has joined its resources and efforts to ours. By continuing to work together with the international community, we are actively contributing to the stability and security of the Indian Ocean region.

I would also work to enhance economic ties between our nations, exploring opportunities for trade and investment that will benefit both Seychelles and the United States. During my previous experience accredited to the Seychelles, I recognized that we had no formal bilateral links in the economic sphere, so I negotiated and, on behalf of the United States, signed an Investment Incentive Agreement between our countries. This remains the guiding document for our economic and commercial engagement, and I look forward to using it to encourage American private sector activity in the Indian Ocean. Despite its relatively high per capita income, Seychelles needs support to strengthen its financial system, both to foster reliable economic growth and to push back on those that might wish to exploit the system for illegal purposes. The United States is well-placed to help in these areas, to our mutual benefit.

I would prioritize cooperation on environmental issues, particularly in the areas of marine conservation and the sustainable development of Seychelles' blue economy. Seychelles has been a leader among small island states in sounding the existential threat posed by rising sea levels and an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Our joint efforts can serve as a model for global cooperation in addressing these pressing challenges.

If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles, I will support and encourage the democratic process and our partnership in international political and security fora. I would promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investors, and diversification of the Seychellois economy. And I would facilitate educational and cultural interactions between our nations, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for our respective histories, traditions, and values.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers and so I would also like to thank your staffs for all they do to support you and your constituents every day. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in the Seychelles and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit one day soon. I am happy to answer any questions.