

**Statement of Vernelle Trim FitzPatrick**  
**Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**June 21, 2023**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am very honored to appear before you today as the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic. I am grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and for your consideration of my nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members of Congress to advance our nation's national security interests in Gabon.

I would not be here before you today without the unwavering love and support of my family. I am eternally grateful to my husband Christopher FitzPatrick -- who has made sacrifices for my service to our country by remaining here at home while I have been posted overseas -- my mother Mary Trim, my sisters Melissa and Debra Trim, and my stepdaughter Anna. Although my father Venantious Trim passed away many years ago, I hope he is looking down on me today with pride.

Over the past 25 years, I have had the honor and privilege to represent our country in Latin America, Europe, and Africa and in domestic assignments in Washington. Throughout my career, I have drawn on values instilled in me and my sisters by my parents, who were immigrants from St. Lucia and who taught us the importance of hard work and sacrifice. I have also drawn from experiences I have had as a native of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where as a child I dreamed of joining the Department of State someday.

I have spent much of my career promoting democracy and good governance, championing human rights, and deepening bilateral relations with various countries. I have not only promoted a greater understanding and appreciation of U.S. foreign policy but also of the American people, building bridges and embracing mutual understanding wherever I have represented our country. Since 2010, I have worked on Eastern, Western, and Central Africa. If confirmed, I will bring all of these experiences to bear in Gabon.

Gabon is a stable, upper middle-income country in Central Africa that is focused on diversifying its economy away from oil and mineral extraction for the good of its people. As part of the Congo Basin, the world's second lung after the Amazon, Gabon is a regional and global leader in efforts to promote biodiversity and conservation, interests that we share. Thanks to its location in the Gulf of Guinea, a strategic maritime space, Gabon has an important role to play in advancing maritime security and commerce in the region. In addition, Gabon adds its voice on the global stage as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a current member of the UN Human Rights Council. It is also hosts the headquarters of the Economic Community of Central African States.

If confirmed, my top priority in Gabon will be to advance the safety and security of the embassy community -- both American and locally employed staff -- as well as all U.S. citizens residing in or visiting the country. As a career Foreign Service Officer, I attach particular importance to the

word service in my job title. There is no higher duty than ensuring the safety and security of the U.S. embassy and the American community.

Helping Gabon to protect its forests and its maritime domain will be my second priority if confirmed. The United States must continue to work closely together with Gabon to support policies that combat climate change and protect the environment not only in the Congo Basin but also around the world, and to counter nature crimes such as illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. It is also important to continue to build Gabon's capacity to counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, counter incidents of piracy and banditry off of its coast and protect its exclusive economic zone.

Deepening our partnership and cooperation with Gabon bilaterally and in international fora is my third top priority. If confirmed, I will continue our dialogue with Gabon on issues before the UN. I will work with our embassy team to advance several agreements we hope to sign with Gabon, including a Defense Cooperation Agreement and a USAID Bilateral Framework Agreement. I will also support U.S. Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Initiative for Atlantic Cooperation activities in Gabon. Having these agreements and engagements in place will more firmly anchor our partnership with Gabon.

Our bilateral relationship with Gabon, which dates back to the country's independence in 1960, also focuses on other important issues. These include: promoting good governance and human rights; improving the business climate which will help attract domestic and foreign investment and enable increased commercial ties; addressing malign influences both in the region and globally; and, increasing people-to-people ties. There is much work to do together with Gabon, and if confirmed, I will rely on my experience and the talents of the embassy team to advance our nation's priorities.

Thank you once again for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.