

Statement of Lisa Peterson
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 21, 2023

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Ricketts, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is a great honor to appear as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi.

I would like to thank the people who have helped form and shape me over many years to arrive at this moment. My husband, Siza Ntshakala, who is currently serving as the Human Resources Officer at our embassy in Accra, Ghana, has steered me to opportunity, guided me away from missteps, and drawn on his life in apartheid South Africa to help me hone my awareness of injustice both on a grand scale and in everyday life. My children by both marriage and biology, Thandeka, Njabulo, and Thabo, my parents David and Janet, and my four siblings have all given me fantastic models of approaches to life and the people around me. Beyond my family circle, there is a whole raft of teachers, friends, and State Department colleagues who have encouraged the curiosity and developed the skills that have helped bring me before you today.

Mr. Chairman, Burundi is small, densely populated, and the poorest country in the world according to World Bank statistics. Forty percent of its over 12 million people are under the age of 15, and these young people are

seeking economic opportunities they currently cannot find in Burundi. It is in our national interest to support Burundi's development and reform efforts to achieve a more stable, prosperous country and Central African region.

The U.S.-Burundi bilateral relationship has improved greatly in the three years since President Evariste Ndayishimiye assumed office. The President reengaged with the international community and pursued reforms across multiple sectors, including holding some individuals accountable for human rights abuses. In 2021, recognizing the changed circumstances, President Biden terminated the Burundi sanctions program, imposed in 2015 in response to violence and repression. This action did not signify that human rights were no longer a concern. As Acting Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, I traveled to Burundi in 2022 to convey our concerns and urge government to take clear action to protect human rights. Ambassador Higgins, Assistant Secretary Phee, and other high-level officials have delivered similar messages. If confirmed, I would continue to raise these issues with the Government of Burundi.

Despite these concerns, there is reason to be optimistic about Burundi's future. As chair of the East African Community, Burundi has played an important role in mediating the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The President has mended relationships with his neighbors. Burundi has reengaged with international financial institutions, reaching a staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund in

April on a program designed to promote macroeconomic reforms and inclusive economic growth. The government took steps to fight corruption and improve rule of law. For the second year in a row, Burundi maintained a Tier 2 ranking in the annual Trafficking in Persons report, due to their significant and increasing efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict human traffickers. If confirmed, I will encourage the government to continue along this positive path.

In Fiscal Year 2022, the United States provided approximately \$90 million in bilateral development and humanitarian assistance to Burundi. Through programs that support the Government of Burundi's efforts to strengthen anti-corruption efforts, prioritize health systems, improve health outcomes, and strengthen global health security, the United States and Burundi have worked together to advance economic opportunity, combat HIV/AIDS and malaria, improve maternal and child health, and reduce the high rate of chronic malnutrition. As we continue to assist the Burundian people, if confirmed, I would ensure this assistance is accompanied by a continued focus on the governance foundations that make economic growth and development viable and sustainable.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.