

**Opening Statement of Michael Heath
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Malawi
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 11, 2024**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee, I'm deeply honored and grateful to appear before you today as the ambassadorial nominee for the Republic of Malawi. I am also grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for placing their confidence in me for this appointment.

I know Senator Coons visited Malawi in March 2024, along with Senators Murray, Peters, Cortez-Masto, and Welch. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with Members of this Committee and your staff to promote and protect U.S. interests in the Republic of Malawi.

I am proud to be accompanied today by my wife Michelle, my son Nicholas, and my daughter Claudia, as they have supported me throughout my previous postings in the Foreign Service both in Washington and abroad. I would like to express my deep thanks to my parents, Ronald and Yoko, who are unfortunately no longer with us, for providing me with the love, encouragement and freedom to choose the Foreign Service as my career path, despite the geographic distance this created between us for long periods of my working life.

I believe that my current position, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa, and my previous work in neighboring Tanzania, has prepared me well for the challenges and opportunities that await in the Republic of Malawi. My first exposure to Africa came over 25 years ago when I served in the Bureau of African Affairs during the development of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Then, as now, our overarching goals on the African continent, and in Malawi itself, are to support democratic and accountable governance, foster private sector investments to expand trade and employment opportunities, and promote Malawi's human capital development. As other countries in sub-Saharan Africa face challenges to their democratic institutions, we will work to ensure that Malawi maintains its current path and becomes a model for the region.

This year, Malawi marked the 60th anniversary of its independence and the 30th anniversary of its transition to multi-party democracy after 30 years of one-party rule. Malawi's recent history highlights the resilience of its core democratic institutions. The successful completion of its most recent presidential elections in June 2020, after the Constitutional Court mandated a rerun of the flawed vote in

2019, underscores the independence and competence of Malawi's courts and electoral commission. Malawi is scheduled to hold its next general election in September 2025, and the United States stands with Malawi in its efforts to remain a model of governance in a region that has experienced democratic backsliding.

This year also marks 60 years of U.S.-Malawi diplomatic relations, and we look forward to opening a new embassy compound next year. The strong bilateral relationship between Malawi and the United States is reflected by the government of Malawi's alignment with U.S. positions on key geopolitical issues. Malawi has strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and boasts one of the highest voting coincidences with the United States at the United Nations among southern African countries.

The United States is Malawi's largest single provider of bilateral assistance, having provided more than \$4.3 billion in total assistance over the last 20 years that has saved millions of lives and improved the livelihoods of an untold number of Malawians in one of the world's poorest countries. We have a large and effective USAID mission that covers areas such as health, education, private sector growth, democracy and governance.

If confirmed, my priorities in Malawi will be to promote effective governance, reduce corruption, increase security, and foster private sector expansion. Our ultimate economic goal is to build trade and employment opportunities to reduce dependence on development assistance, resulting in inclusive and sustainable wealth generation. I want to support Malawi's human capital development so its citizens can freely participate in the country's growth as a healthy, educated, and self-reliant populace.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will do my utmost to protect American citizens and all mission personnel – Malawians and Americans alike. Those of us who have served abroad know of the great contributions made to our missions by host country nationals. Instilling a sense of community and camaraderie amongst them, as well as among contractors, Peace Corps volunteers, and others, will be among my top priorities.

I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the rest of the Committee today, and I look forward to your questions.