

**Opening Statement of Kali Jones
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 19, 2024**

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. I am humbled by the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. And I wish to thank the Members of this Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Please allow me to begin with thanks to my family. I want to first express my gratitude to my parents, Dr. Stella Pinkney-Jones and the late Harry Jones, for their love and dedication. Our family motto is "service is the rent you pay for your space on Earth," and that has been my guiding light through my career as a Foreign Service Officer. I also want to thank my siblings, Dr. Brigette Jones-McGeathy, who served as a Captain in the U.S. Air Force, Shaunna Jones and Harry Jones II. Lastly, I want to thank my husband Nicholas Sims, who is here with me today, for his steadfast support; he encouraged me to serve our country and advance the mission of State at the highest levels.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to advance U.S. policy and to strengthen our bilateral partnership with Benin, pursuing our shared interests in promoting economic development, fortifying democratic institutions, and fostering regional security cooperation.

Benin stands out as one of our most steadfast partners in a region increasingly important to our national security and economic interests. The government of Benin has prioritized private-sector led economic growth, a necessity given that over one-third of Benin's population lives in poverty. In order to optimize economic growth, challenges such as limited infrastructure and under-resourced health and education services need to be addressed.

The United States is taking action with programs made possible through the Global Fragility Act and our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability to strengthen social cohesion, improve government responsiveness and inclusion, and enhance security force responsiveness and accountability to communities at-risk for violent extremist influence in northern Benin.

The United States and Benin are both invested in the success of the Millenium Challenge Corporation, whose third compact aims to improve regional transportation infrastructure, reform transportation regulations, and facilitate market access. The third compact in Benin also marks the first instance in the history of the Millenium Challenge Corporation where the host government's financial contribution to a project is larger than the U.S. contribution - a testament to the value Benin places on the project and its relationship to the United States.

Benin is a strong partner to the United States in promoting peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. Recognizing the ongoing threat of violent extremism, Benin's government is committed to improving its counterterrorism capabilities and participating in regional security efforts. The United States supports these initiatives through training programs and significant equipment donations to strengthen Benin's defense and military capabilities. If

confirmed, I will prioritize engaging with the Government of Benin on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism— including enhancing security sector assistance, community building, and youth development to strengthen social cohesion and civil society resilience in line with our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.

For nearly three decades, Benin has been regarded as a model of multi-party democracy in West Africa. Recent restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and changes to electoral laws have underscored the need for the United States to support Benin in upholding its democratic values and human rights. Upcoming elections in 2026 will be a critical test for Benin’s democracy. If confirmed, I will work closely work with Benin’s government, civil society, and other stakeholders to promote open and inclusive governance. This includes strengthening the rule of law and enhancing the capacity of independent institutions. I will also engage with human rights defenders and support initiatives that advocate for fundamental freedoms, ensuring that all voices in Benin have the opportunity to be heard.

As always, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the welfare and safety of American citizens, including my colleagues at Embassy Cotonou.

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the honor to appear before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you. I welcome your questions.