

**Opening Statement of Joann Lockard  
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
November 16, 2023**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, it is my great honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso. I deeply appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary of State have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members of Congress to advance our nation's interests in Burkina Faso.

I am here because of the support of my family and friends. My father, a 23-year Air Force veteran, and my mother, who retired after a 36-year civil service career, instilled in me a great love for our country and inspired me to serve the United States in global affairs. Together, with my husband, Aaron, and my three children, Caitlin, Alexandra, and Sam, I have dedicated the last twenty-five years to doing just that. Across Latin America, Africa, and Europe, together, we have served the American people, building bridges across oceans and cultures. I am tremendously grateful for my family's support. Repeatedly, they have sacrificed, leaving friends and family to travel to places they didn't know or where they couldn't speak the language. One assignment left an indelible mark on us. In 2006, as we touched down in Ouagadougou for the first time, Caitlin, then four, crawled up on her knees to peer out the window and exclaimed, "Mommy and Papi, thank you for bringing me to Africa!" Our fellow passengers erupted in applause for her enthusiasm. It set the tone for our coming adventure and launched a decade and a half of love and respect for the welcoming embrace of Burkina Faso and the Burkinabè people.

Unfortunately, subsequent years have brought Burkina Faso daunting and unrelenting challenges. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Burkinabè people for the losses suffered at the hands of terrorists in recent years.

At the heart of U.S. foreign policy in West Africa, Burkina Faso now faces an unprecedented security, political, and humanitarian crisis. The country finds itself the epicenter of violence in an increasingly fragile region. Leaders of the January 2022 coup d'état and subsequent

September military takeover cited this insecurity as their motivation, yet the situation continues to deteriorate. Continued U.S. engagement is more vital than ever to help Burkina Faso confront the spread of terrorism and respond to the needs of its citizens – both while respecting human rights and protecting civilians. Our ability to provide military assistance to Burkina Faso is restricted by section 7008, the military coup provision. Given the urgent security situation, if confirmed, it will be my highest priority to support Burkina Faso’s return to a democratically elected, civilian-led government as soon as possible. Such progress will allow us to increase cooperation and assist Burkina Faso in its struggle against violent extremism, reinforcing the voice of the Burkinabè people in their own governance, and promoting peace, stability, and security while countering threats to U.S. citizens and interests.

The conflict in Burkina Faso has displaced more than two million people and resulted in limited food access for more than 15 percent of the population. In addition to facing a grave security crisis, Burkina Faso confronts high population growth, limited natural resources, and vulnerability to climate change, all of which contribute to bleak economic prospects in one of the poorest countries in the world. If confirmed, I will work with colleagues across the U.S. government to increase health security for the Burkinabè people, promote economic and social development, and strengthen Burkina Faso’s resilience to climate shocks.

Reports of human rights violations, increases in political intimidation tactics, undue restrictions on freedom of expression, and a clampdown on journalists and civil society activities are deeply concerning signs of democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso. I am encouraged, however, by recent efforts that show some movement toward change, such as trials for accused terrorists in June of this year, which we hope will continue, and positive steps forward to prevent trafficking in persons. If confirmed, I will encourage Burkina Faso, known as the Land of the Upright People, to uphold the rule of law, and continue to build on these initial steps.

Finally, I take very seriously my commitment to protect U.S. citizens overseas, including mission personnel. This includes ensuring that our Embassy in Ouagadougou is properly staffed to undertake these challenging tasks. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to protect Americans and American interests in Burkina Faso and ensure the security of our mission. At

this crucial time in history, when Burkina Faso is severing historic ties and seeking new partnerships, it's more critical than ever that the United States remain engaged. I believe that the Burkinabè people are looking for a partner who can instill hope and stand by their side to tackle the difficult challenges ahead. I believe that the United States can and should be that partner.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.