

Statement of Bryan Hunt
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 16, 2023

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me. If confirmed, I will work closely with you to advance our nation's partnership with Sierra Leone.

For more than two decades, it has been my honor to serve as a member of the U.S. Foreign Service – oftentimes in dangerous and austere locations. I could not have done so without the love and support of my family and friends, many of whom are here today. If confirmed, I look forward, with their help, to once again strive to advance U.S. interests in Africa – a region of the world on which I have focused much of my career and one which I believe has the potential in the coming decade to play an even greater role on the world stage – provided the democratic aspirations of its young and vibrant population are met.

The Republic of Sierra Leone has demonstrated that democratic progress is possible. Since the end of the country's devastating decade long civil war in 2002 and with sustained support from international friends, including the United States,

the people of Sierra Leone have rebuilt, maintained peace, and most importantly hewed to a democratic path through four rounds of national elections that were broadly judged to be free and fair. Next month, Sierra Leoneans will once again head to the polls and much more important than the political outcome will be the manner and environment in which this latest electoral contest is conducted. A free and fair election that is competitive, inclusive, and held peacefully is essential both for the prosperous future that the people of Sierra Leone desire and for an expanded U.S.-Sierra Leonean partnership. If confirmed, I will ensure that support for democracy and good governance remains at the forefront of the embassy's work with the goal of helping Sierra Leoneans institutionalize their democracy and ensure it delivers.

Despite progress, Sierra Leone ranks 181st out of 189 countries on the UN's Human Development Index. The 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic have stressed a health system already struggling with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, neglected tropical diseases, and malaria. Sierra Leone made effective use of U.S. health security investments to fully vaccinate 70 percent of its eligible target population against COVID-19. Its government should, however, continue to allocate resources to the health sector not only to protect its own citizens but also to sustainably safeguard the region and the broader international community from future disease outbreaks. If confirmed, I

will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority and that U.S. funding is used effectively to complement Sierra Leone's own efforts.

Sierra Leone has made progress in establishing a market-based economy and has taken steps to protect workers' rights. U.S. investment in and trade with Sierra Leone has the potential to advance prosperity both for Americans and Sierra Leoneans. If confirmed, I will work closely with the U.S. business community to advocate for reforms that enhance Sierra Leone's ability to attract high-quality foreign investment, including through regional market integration, while simultaneously using trade development tools to help ensure U.S. businesses remain competitive in the Sierra Leonean marketplace.

I hold paramount the safety and security of the hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do everything within my power to ensure their security and well-being.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, I am committed to working with you all to advance American interests overseas. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I welcome your questions.