

Statement of Makila James
Ambassador-Designate to Swaziland
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 22, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great privilege and honor for me to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Kingdom of Swaziland. I am extremely pleased to have my family here with me – my husband Louis Wells and my son Mandela. They have always provided me with their unwavering love and support throughout my Foreign Service career and I am most grateful to them.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the Honorable members of this Committee to advance U.S. interests in Swaziland. I am confident that based on my 24 years in the Foreign Service I am prepared for the challenges of leading our efforts to strive for an HIV-free generation, promote democracy and good governance, support respect for human rights and the rule of law, and foster sustainable development in Swaziland. I have spent the vast majority of my Foreign Service career working in or on Africa. I have served as Principal Officer in Juba, Southern Sudan; Political Officer in Harare, Zimbabwe; and Political /Economic Officer in Kaduna, Nigeria; as well as Desk Officer for

Sierra Leone and The Gambia; International Relations Officer for Africa in the United Nations Security Council; and a Member of the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Office responsible for Africa. I believe that my experiences in Zimbabwe, a country still in transition towards greater democratization, has especially prepared me to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland as it confronts similar challenges in expanding democracy. My overall experiences in each of these assignments has prepared me to serve in a difficult environment and afforded me a broad knowledge of the region and people.

In my current position as Director of Caribbean Affairs, I have led my staff in supporting U.S. policy in the fourteen countries and several independent territories for which I am responsible, helping to strengthen democratic institutions, address major threats to citizen security, promote human rights and encourage economic development. I have also served as Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Office of Southern African Affairs. These positions, as well as my service in Juba, have provided me with the important management skills which I would bring to an assignment as U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland.

Swaziland is an extraordinary country and valued partner of the United States. As one of the few resident diplomatic missions in the Kingdom, we have a unique opportunity to directly engage and influence the government on issues of shared strategic interest. We must take advantage of this opportunity as Swaziland

faces an uncertain future. After decades of absolute monarchy, the government's initial efforts to expand political freedoms have slowed. Swazi citizens have limited ability to engage meaningfully in politics, and basic rights such as the freedom of assembly, speech, and press are restricted. A deeply traditional society that prides itself on stability, the Kingdom is beset by modern problems: fiscal shortfalls, a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the need for political change towards a more inclusive democratic system.

Despite these serious challenges, I am confident that progress remains possible and that we must work diligently to pursue our goals in Swaziland. If confirmed, I will serve as Ambassador during a crucial moment in Swazi history. Under my guidance, the U.S. Embassy would continue to advance democracy in Swaziland by encouraging support for key government institutions, including parliament and the judiciary, which engender and uphold democratic values. We would also support civil society, labor unions, the media, and other institutions that hold the government accountable, in particular in the run-up to the 2013 parliamentary elections, a possible turning point in Swaziland's future. I would also work closely with the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland and civil society to enhance the status of women and girls – critical areas of engagement to help address the HIV-AIDS epidemic, support poverty alleviation efforts, and uphold universal human rights. Like many Swazis, I, too, am convinced that there

is no fundamental trade-off between democracy and tradition, that Swazis can be both proud of their culture and proud of their freedom.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Swaziland's future, however, lies in the health of its people. Swaziland has the most severe national HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis crises in the world, with an HIV prevalence of 26 percent and a life expectancy of only 43 years. The United States is helping Swaziland fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic by providing resources under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. PEPFAR's budget for Swaziland has risen from roughly \$9 million in 2007 to \$33 million in 2011. To stem the tide of HIV/AIDS and help improve aid effectiveness, the U.S. Government has signed a Partnership Framework Agreement with the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, the second-ever agreement of its kind. This Partnership has contributed significantly to Swaziland's prevention of mother-to-child transmission and HIV treatment programs, among the most effective in all of sub-Saharan Africa. The aim now is to strengthen public health and community systems to sustain the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic beyond the PEPFAR program's lifespan. If confirmed, I will work to increase Swazi government accountability and capacity to combat HIV/AIDS, while promoting Swazi-led efforts to create an HIV-free generation.

Compounding the challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the government of Swaziland is challenged by a fiscal crisis that has hampered the government's

ability to operate effectively. If confirmed, I will continue our work with the Swazi government to promote economic reforms, provide technical assistance, and encourage fiscal transparency and accountability. In addition, I will promote labor reforms and provide other guidance for Swaziland to remain eligible for African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) benefits, and I will advocate for U.S. businesses seeking to enter the Swazi market. AGOA is a critically important program in Swaziland that is helping the country address its serious unemployment rate of 41%. Swaziland is a country that has successfully utilized AGOA and is one of the top African exporters of textile to the United States. AGOA employs approximately 15,000 Swazi workers in the textile sector, many of them women. I would encourage Swaziland to demonstrate the continued progress required for renewed AGOA eligibility to ensure its continued access to its trade preferences.

As a rotating chair of regional organizations, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the African Union, Swaziland is important to U.S. interests as it wields significant influence despite its small size. It is critical to our regional strategic interests that we ensure Swaziland is stable. Fortunately, the U.S.-Swaziland bilateral relationship is strong. There is no greater evidence of our friendship than the vibrant Peace Corps program, through which 66 American volunteers are currently engaged in community health/HIV prevention and youth development. As the impact of the Peace Corps volunteers continues to gradually

expand throughout 2012, I would focus on working with the in-country Peace Corps staff to ensure the effectiveness of this important program -- the face of America throughout much of rural Swaziland-- as well as the safety and welfare of each of the volunteers. Encouraged by the mutual respect our two nations share and energized by the challenges that lie ahead, I look forward to serving as U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland, if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.