

**Statement of Edward M. Alford
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of The Gambia
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Thursday, May 17, 2012 2:30p.m.**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I wish to express my gratitude to the President and Secretary of State for the trust and confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia. I want to recognize my family, represented by my daughter Sylvia who is here to support me.

As a U.S. Foreign Service Officer for more than 33 years, I enjoyed assignments which provided a variety of experiences in eleven different countries including three assignments in Africa totaling almost nine years. I have worked extensively with the interagency community, especially in recent assignments in Frankfurt and Baghdad. I have particularly enjoyed mentoring my younger colleagues and helping them develop their careers. If confirmed, I believe the variety of my experience and my record of leadership in fostering mission effectiveness and morale under often difficult circumstances will enable me to carry out the duties and responsibilities of a U.S. Ambassador.

The United States has a close and historic relationship with Gambians, who have embraced the role of the Peace Corps in their country since 1967. With 83 volunteers in country, the Peace Corps is the central component of our public diplomacy and U.S. development assistance. Last year, President Jammeh showed his gratitude for the Peace Corps by hosting the Golden Jubilee, which commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps and their 45 years in The Gambia. The United States has a small diplomatic footprint in Banjul, but we arguably have more leverage than any other Western country thanks to our positive bilateral relationship and continuing Peace Corps presence.

The U.S. embassy closely followed the 2011 and 2012 electoral processes and worked to support credible, independent media and political parties, as well as democratic practices. Despite shortcomings, the presidential elections in November 2011 were judged free and fair by several international and domestic observation teams. While there was high voter turnout, several organizations expressed concern at the “unlevel playing field” for candidates in advance of the elections. The March 2012 parliamentary elections were also deemed generally peaceful and fair, but opposition parties boycotted the election, leaving them with only 5 of the 48 elected seats in Parliament.

Promoting human rights remains the top U.S. priority in The Gambia. The U.S. Mission in Banjul maintains a close dialogue with the government and civil society on the human rights situation. The Gambia has taken significant steps to address trafficking in persons through enforcement of legislation and the rescue and rehabilitation of victims. Continued engagement with Gambian authorities on press freedom and civil liberties will constitute a central piece of our bilateral relationship.

If confirmed, I will continue our economic and regional security partnership with the Gambia. Through The Gambia's contributions to peacekeeping missions, we have enjoyed a steadfast partnership in efforts to promote regional stability. The Gambia also plays a positive role in counter narcotics in the region and sustaining these efforts along with enhancing the country's maritime security capacity is another important focus of our diplomacy.

The U.S. Embassy must continue to work with the government and private sector to facilitate the growth of the tourism industry and the export of several commodities including apparel and fisheries to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

U.S. staffing in Banjul consists of 13 Embassy officials and two Peace Corps American staff. If confirmed, I would make my top concern the

safety and security of nearly 2,000 U.S. Citizens in The Gambia, half of whom at any time are tourists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to appear today. I would be pleased to respond to your questions.