

**Statement of Shari Villarosa
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Mauritius
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Wednesday, September 12, 2012**

Thank you, Chairman Udall and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to discuss my nomination by President Obama to become the Ambassador of the United States to Mauritius and the Seychelles. I would like to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the honor of this nomination.

It has been a particular honor for my family and me personally to defend and advance our interests around the world to help keep our nation free, prosperous and secure. My family's long history of service to this country dates back to the Revolution. My father, both grandfathers and every preceding generation fought for this nation so we could live in freedom. My international travels as an "Army brat" began at the age of six months when I accompanied my parents serving in Germany. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to experience firsthand the amazing breadth and diversity of the United States, living in or visiting all but two of our 50 states.

My Foreign Service career provided me a broad range of responsibilities, working closely with many other U.S. government agencies in Washington and overseas. I have served twice as Charge d'Affaires. I was a vocal advocate in Burma for human rights and democracy and hope that I contributed to the opening we are now seeing. I also set up our embassy in this millennium's first new independent nation, East Timor. Most recently, I was responsible for building political will and capacity around the world to confront critical terrorist threats to our country from actors in Central Asia, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Sahel. We have developed strong partnerships with many nations around the world, including Mauritius and Seychelles, to eliminate terrorist safe havens, disrupt terrorist plots, and dry up the pools of potential terrorist recruits.

I am very excited at the prospect of serving in Mauritius and Seychelles, should the Senate confirm me. These countries, while small, are geo-strategically located along important sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. As a result of their

expansive Exclusive Economic Zones, covering 3.2 million square kilometers, they have vast maritime resources. They share our values in support of democracy and free markets. They are outward looking, which has enabled them to gain prominence on the international stage by their willingness to exercise leadership on key issues. Their heterogeneous populations reflect their international focus and should make it easy for me, as a product of the melting pot that is the United States, to fit right in.

Mauritius is a thriving democracy that the Democracy Index ranks as the only full democracy in Africa. It also ranks first among all African countries in the 2012 Ibrahim Index based on effective governance that informs and empowers citizens, civil society, and governmental actors. Mauritius has prospered due to its reliance on free market economic principles. The World Bank's 2012 Doing Business Report ranks Mauritius first among African economies and 23rd worldwide. The Heritage Foundation ranks Mauritius first in Sub-Saharan Africa and eighth worldwide in its 2012 Index of Economic Freedom.

Mauritius has been one of the leading beneficiaries of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), one of the centerpieces of the Administration's policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa. As Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson remarked in June, the vision of AGOA to spur economic development, trade, and investment is becoming a reality. If I am confirmed, I would like to increase U.S. exports to this healthy, thriving market economy, expanding upon the links between the two economies forged by Mauritius' imports to the United States under AGOA. In this regard, I would note that Congressional extension of AGOA's Third Country Fabric Extension was a great relief to the government and people of Mauritius, is important to regional trade, and politically is very important to our bilateral relationship. We appreciate the bipartisan work and support of this Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Senate leadership in ensuring this extension. I think we can make better use of 21st century means of communication and transportation to increase our trade with Mauritius.

Mauritius has been a good partner with us in the United Nations, and has indicated its willingness to provide police as part of UN peacekeeping efforts. We should welcome its offer to help build stability in fragile countries and offer to

assist in providing the necessary training so Mauritius can help others build the foundations for stable civilian-led government that respects the rule of law.

Seychelles has also taken on important leadership responsibilities in confronting a relatively recent challenge to global security: piracy stemming from Somalia that poses serious risks to commercial trade, particularly sea-borne cargo. Seychelles, more than any other government in the region with the possible exception of Kenya, stepped up to try these criminals and hold them accountable for their crimes, which helps restore maritime security for all. This is particularly notable, considering Seychelles' relatively small size and resources in comparison to most other countries in the region. Through our cooperation on counterpiracy and counterterrorism efforts in recent years, Seychelles has quickly grown to become one of the U.S. government's strongest partners in Africa.

Seychelles shifted away from one-party rule in 1991 to institute a multi-party system of government. It has also turned away from the socialist policies of the past to pursue market-oriented policies, enacting an economic reform program which has enabled the country to significantly reduce its debt from 98% of GDP to 56% in 2010, run budget surpluses, and in 2011 grow by 6.2% at time when much of the world has been in recession.

If I am confirmed, I will try to encourage Seychelles' continued progress in implementing sound political and economic reforms and protecting human rights. In addition, with the Senate's help, I hope that we can continue to support the efforts of Seychelles to counter piracy and promote better security in East Africa and the Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, I am honored to be nominated to serve as the United States Ambassador to Mauritius and Seychelles. If confirmed, I will do my best to strengthen our partnership with both nations to advance democratic and free market principles, as well as to confront any threats to those principles, thereby increasing U.S. and global security. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have at this time.