

**Statement of John Hoover**  
**Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Sierra Leone**  
**Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**September 24, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Flake, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and for your consideration of my nomination by President Obama to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank President Obama and Secretary Kerry for their trust in me to lead the U.S. Embassy and manage our relationship with Sierra Leone. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I shall uphold that trust. I am also honored to be joined here today by my wife Kathy.

In the aftermath of its devastating civil war, which ended a little more than a decade ago, much progress has been made in Sierra Leone towards consolidating peace, establishing and strengthening democracy, and generating sustainable economic development. Indeed, in some respects, despite meager resources, Sierra Leone is emerging as a model for post-conflict recovery and development. The country has held three rounds of successful presidential and parliamentary elections since 2002, including most recently in November 2012, when the country held elections widely judged to be free, fair, and transparent. Sierra Leone is implementing economic reforms and opening itself up to investment. The results are encouraging as the economy grew by around 15 percent last year. The IMF predicts the economy will continue to grow at similarly high rates for the

remainder of this decade, and that Sierra Leone stands poised for an economic takeoff which could propel the country to middle income status after 2020. On the security front, whereas Sierra Leone had the dubious distinction of hosting then-largest UN peacekeeping mission during its civil war, the country is now a contributor of peacekeepers to regional stability. Earlier this year, a battalion of Sierra Leonean soldiers, trained and equipped by the United States, deployed to the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Yet, even as Sierra Leone rises and rebuilds, the country still faces daunting challenges. Despite rapid recent economic growth, Sierra Leone is still one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking only 10 countries from the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index. Sierra Leone also still faces many tests in terms of strengthening governance and rule of law. Despite recent encouraging progress in pursuing corrupt officials, corruption remains entrenched and poses a major threat to Sierra Leone's nascent democracy and still fragile social stability.

If confirmed, I will continue our focus on strengthening democratic institutions and norms in Sierra Leone, including continued support for anti-corruption efforts. I will also work to continue U.S. support for market-oriented small-farmer agricultural activity and education to increase employment and food security, and basic health care. I will continue also to promote greater transparency, accountability, and economic sustainability as Sierra Leone begins to earn significant new revenues from its abundant stock of natural resources. I will

work closely with the U.S. business community to encourage greater trade and investment between our two countries as a way to spur prosperity for Americans and Sierra Leoneans alike. In December 2012, Sierra Leone became eligible to develop a compact program with the Millennium Challenge Corporation, opening an opportunity for significant new U.S. government investment in Sierra Leone's future. If confirmed, I will work to support successful compact development.

In addition to these policy priorities, I take as my most important responsibility, the safety and security of hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their dependents, and our invaluable Sierra Leonean colleagues.

I first served in Africa as a junior officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mbabane, Swaziland. I returned to Africa later in my career to Nairobi, Kenya as the Counselor for Economic Affairs, and then as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Kampala, Uganda. Most recently, I was the Director of the Africa Bureau's Office of Regional and Security Affairs. If confirmed, I would bring a strong understanding of the African continent and the needs of its people, as well as the knowledge and experience to successfully advance our national interests in Freetown.

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