

Statement by Michael S. Hoza
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Cameroon
before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 24, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Flake, and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Cameroon. I thank President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the trust they have shown by nominating me for this position.

I would like to acknowledge the service and support of my wife Suzanne, currently overseas advancing US Government health programs in Ethiopia, and our two sons, Paul and Christopher. They have supported me through challenging overseas assignments, endured hardship, shared risks, and ably represented our country with pride and unflagging enthusiasm. I am truly grateful for their support, without which I would not be before you today.

I have had the privilege of serving in Africa for 14 of my 28 years of service with the State Department. I have seen our diplomatic efforts yield tremendous gains in difficult places and, if confirmed, I look forward to using my experience in the region to help further U.S. interests in Cameroon as well.

With one of the largest economies in sub-Saharan Africa and a landscape rich in natural resources and biodiversity, Cameroon has the potential to become an economic stalwart and serious regional player. Despite this rich endowment, and notwithstanding 53 years of relative political and economic stability, the country struggles to attain food security and to combat disease. Moreover, concerns related to human rights, weak governance, and pervasive corruption continue to serve as impediments to meaningful economic growth and development.

Cameroon is a relatively stable country in a region that is less so. Recent events in both Nigeria and the Central African Republic continue to spill over into Cameroon, where an influx of new refugees is taxing local resources. The insecurity in neighboring countries, compounded with the growing threat of extremism by Boko Haram in Cameroon's Far North

region, has the potential to threaten Cameroon's security and stability. Cameroon has taken a leading role in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and is active in regional and domestic efforts against wildlife trafficking. If confirmed I will continue to support U.S. efforts to strengthen Cameroon's military capacity to confront terrorism, piracy and wildlife trafficking and to encourage greater Cameroonian engagement in regional security matters.

On April 14, Cameroon took an important step toward maintaining its long term political stability by holding the first Senate elections in its history. Cameroon is also expected to hold municipal and legislative elections on September 30. I look forward to the opportunity to build on this momentum and work in partnership with civil society and the government to support efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, enhance transparency, and promote democracy, human rights for all persons and the rule of law.

Bilateral trade between our countries exceeded \$557 million in 2012, and U.S. exports to Cameroon have more than doubled since 2010. Should I be confirmed, I hope to build on these gains and further strengthen our economic relationship— one of the cornerstones of U.S.-Cameroon ties. Achieving this goal, as well as Cameroon's goal of promoting increased U.S. investment in Cameroon, will require continued attention to improving the country's business climate, addressing endemic corruption, and improving transparency.

The kidnapping of French expatriates in Cameroon's Far North region earlier this year demonstrated that even in a seemingly stable and safe country such as Cameroon, the threat of violence and extremism can be a reality. It has also reaffirmed that, now more than ever, the safety and security of our American staff and citizens overseas needs to be at the forefront of our mission. If confirmed, I will ensure that this remains a top priority for the embassy.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and others in Congress to advance U.S. interests in Cameroon. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.