

**Statement of Carolyn P. Alsup
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of The Gambia
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Thursday, July 30, 2015, 2:00 pm**

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.

If confirmed, I would embrace the opportunity to apply my 23 years of experience as a Foreign Service Officer to advance U.S. priorities in The Gambia. I believe my previous experience as Deputy Chief of Mission in The Gambia from 2005 to 2007 and my most recent experience as Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy in Ghana would be particularly helpful in continuing to advocate for U.S. objectives in The Gambia. Throughout my Foreign Service career I have relied upon my ability to build and maintain a strong, collaborative team with high morale and a clear sense of purpose to advance U.S. interests and objectives – whether it was promoting increased literacy, facilitating U.S. investment, encouraging entrepreneurship, advancing human rights, or supporting democratic institutions and free and fair elections. I believe I am well-prepared to assume the duties and responsibilities of U.S. Ambassador to The Gambia and to deal with the many opportunities and challenges associated with that position.

The United States and The Gambia share a long history dating back to the mid-1800s. The Gambia has a rich cultural heritage perhaps made most famous in the United States by Alex Haley's novel, *Roots*, which, still today, brings many African-Americans to the country on a journey to discover their heritage.

The United States is committed to helping the Gambian people improve their lives by promoting democratic principles, human rights, and economic development. If confirmed, I will continue our efforts to engage the Government of The Gambia on these core areas to accomplish our shared goal of a greater prosperity for The Gambia and for the Gambian people.

The Gambia is a troop contributing country for UN peacekeeping missions, including a substantial presence in Darfur, a very important contribution to international peace and security. But peace and security must start at home. The Gambia – as a predominately moderate, Muslim country where people of different faiths have long lived together with little tension – could play an important role in promoting tolerance and countering violent extremism.

However, The Gambia will not be able to play that role to the fullest without making changes at home. We remain deeply concerned about the downward trajectory of The Gambia's human rights record. Gambians are being arbitrarily arrested and detained for longer than the constitutionally-mandated 72-hour period, and discriminatory legislation and verbal and physical abuse have been targeted against the LGBTI community. Furthermore, we still do not know the whereabouts of two missing Gambian-American citizens who were last seen in The Gambia over two years ago. Human rights is a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy; respecting and upholding human rights is also a cornerstone of maintaining a just and peace society and mitigating the lure of violent extremism. In my career, I have found that when we as diplomats are open to dialogue - to listen and speak frankly - that we can make great strides in narrowing our differences on even the most contentious of issues. If confirmed, I will seek regular dialogue with Gambian officials, political parties, civil society, journalists, youth and women to emphasize the importance of respect for, and protection of, all human rights.

Lastly, although the U.S. Embassy footprint in The Gambia is small, we are able to expand our reach through the 92 Peace Corps volunteers working in the education, environment, and health sectors. Peace Corps has been active in The Gambia since 1967 and has been warmly welcomed by the government and people of The Gambia. If confirmed, I would make my top concern the safety and security of the nearly 2,000 U.S. Citizens in The Gambia, about half of whom are minors.

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