

Statement of Anne S. Casper
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 8, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi. I am extremely grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Burundi and help Burundians achieve the bright future they deserve.

Accompanying me here today is my husband, Karl Deringer, who has served in U.S. missions overseas as a nurse and in 2012 won the Secretary of State's award for volunteerism in Africa. I would not be here today without his support. I would also like to mention my mother, Ilene Casper, who taught me the value of education, my brother Larry, an assistant U.S. attorney, and my late father, Charles Casper, a self-made man and proud veteran who modeled service to our country and a father who pushed his daughter to follow her dreams.

Mr. Chairman, Burundi has been a friend of the United States since its founding as a republic in 1962. Roughly the size of New Hampshire and located in the heart of Africa, Burundi is home to over 10 million citizens.

After decades of ethnic conflict, political violence, one-party rule, and a civil war that killed over 300,000 people in Burundi, the signing of the Arusha Agreement in 2000 established a framework for peaceful political competition and ushered in a decade of hope. However, events over the past year have led Burundi away from the spirit and promise of Arusha.

Since April 2015, when the Burundi government signaled its intent to disregard term limits in violation of the Arusha Agreement, over 400 people have been killed and 260,000 have fled to neighboring countries. Targeted violence, assassination, sexual and gender-based violence and retaliatory attacks have continued with impunity, further threatening Burundi's fragile peace. Mr. Chairman, this killing must stop. Ending this crisis and restoring stability to Burundi requires leadership and it requires courage. Peace that binds all parties is essential for a return to a positive trajectory in Burundi.

The United States remains seized with resolving this crisis through direct engagement. We are pressing all sides to stop the violence and commit to participating in the East African Community-led dialogue process, which most recently convened last month. Additionally, the United States is supporting the deployment and important work of UN and African Union (AU) human rights monitors, and continues to engage the UN, AU, and regional partners on contingency planning.

Mr. Chairman, young people make up over half of all Burundian citizens and they are seeking education and jobs in ever greater numbers. Given the dearth of opportunity, however, they are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into militias. The U.S. government runs programs with local partners to develop opportunities for young people, strengthen conflict resolution, monitor for hate speech and promote peaceful messaging. If I am confirmed, Embassy staff and I will continue to reach out broadly to strengthen these efforts and expand opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, Burundi's fragile economy continues to deteriorate, increasing Burundians' health and nutritional challenges. The U.S. government provides \$50 million annually in USAID-funded assistance programs, primarily to the health sector. We have also contributed \$86 million in humanitarian assistance for refugees affected by the current crisis. If confirmed, I will work to ensure this assistance remains effective.

I would also note that Burundi has made important contributions to peacekeeping, particularly countering Al Shabaab in Somalia.

Finally, our Mission in Bujumbura has performed admirably under very difficult circumstances over the past year. I look forward, if confirmed, to working with every one of our Embassy staff, American and locally employed alike. Ensuring the continued safety of American citizens residing in Burundi and the security of our staff are my highest priorities.

Here in Washington, just the other day, I saw a high-value, single-source coffee for sale, from Burundi. Its quality, and pledge that a good price had been paid to the farmer, reminded me of Burundi's promising prospects.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will bring the collective experiences of my 23 years in the Foreign Service to advance U.S. interests; I will also help Burundi's people restore their nation and their lives so that they export products, not people, and so that when the world thinks of Burundi and the center of Africa, we will not dwell on their fears, but share with Burundians the promise of their hopes.

