

Testimony of Sandra Clark
Nominee to be Ambassador to Burkina Faso
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 13, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am deeply honored to appear as the nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position.

I would like to recognize my husband, Alan Tolerton, and thank him for his unfailing love and his willingness to accompany me on this journey, and my wonderful and intrepid daughter, Emma. I am grateful to my brothers, Gregory and David, and my sister-in-law Lisa, for their support. I am thankful for the gifts we received from our late parents, our mother who immigrated to the United States after the Second World War, and our father whose family has long and deep roots in New England. I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues who are joining us virtually today.

If confirmed as Ambassador, I will marshal my 34 years of experience as a Foreign Service Officer to promote and protect U.S. interests and values in Burkina Faso. I would look forward to working closely with members of this Committee and your staffs in that endeavor. Burkina Faso is at the nexus of U.S. strategic interests in the Sahel and West Africa. This country, with its proud tradition of peaceful coexistence among its diverse communities, remains the bulwark against extremism expanding to its neighbors. If confirmed, I will spearhead our efforts, with our Burkinabe partners and international allies, on the interlinked objectives of advancing regional security; promoting democracy, good governance, and human rights; and encouraging economic opportunity and development.

Burkina Faso – and our bilateral partnership – cannot truly flourish if it is plagued by violence. Armed attacks have driven over three-quarters of a million people from their homes. The security and law enforcement services face a daunting challenge and require support to enable them to counter this threat while protecting the population. If confirmed, I will continue our work to develop more capable and professional military and law enforcement services which respect human rights.

Burkina Faso is working with other nations, such as G5 Sahel members, to resolve the region's problems. The United States has likeminded partners there. This is why the Secretary approved a Diplomatic Engagement Framework for the Sahel and appointed a U.S. Special Envoy to maximize our collective impact. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Special Envoy to coordinate and leverage these many efforts.

Burkina Faso is a young democracy. President Roch Kabore is the first democratically elected president after the 27-year rule of his predecessor, ousted in October 2014. The Burkinabe continue to respect, criticize, and shape their democracy. Peaceful elections later this year that accurately reflect the will of the people will be crucial to solidifying that democracy. Burkina Faso's judicial system has struggled to bring terrorists and human rights violators to justice. If

confirmed, I will build on our relationships with the government and with the country's vibrant media and civil society organizations to strengthen democratic institutions and practices that advocate for human rights.

The Burkinabe are dynamic and creative and seek a better economic future. The United States is partnering with them through such agencies as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is working to finalize a second compact with Burkina Faso this year. These programs, coupled with U.S. diplomacy and the ingenuity of the U.S. private sector, should promote economic growth and create jobs in both countries, especially for the burgeoning youth population. The United States has provided humanitarian and other assistance to the people of Burkina Faso over the years, including the establishment of a national public health emergency operations center, which is playing a pivotal role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the epidemiologist leading Burkina Faso's COVID 19 response is a Centers for Disease Control Fellow who just returned to the country. I am proud of the role the United States has played in helping the Burkinabe respond to the pandemic and of the Embassy's success in assisting more than 150 Americans return home.

It would be an honor and a privilege, if confirmed, to lead our talented and committed Embassy staff at this critical juncture in Burkina Faso.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.