

Statement by Ambassador Isobel Coleman
before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Multilateral
International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and international
Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy

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Thank you Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Udall and distinguished members of the committee for inviting me to testify on our efforts to make the United Nations a more efficient and effective institution.

I have been in my role as U.S. Ambassador for UN Management and Reform for nearly five months now, and have had numerous opportunities to see firsthand how the work of the UN is both “indispensable” and “imperfect.” I recently returned from visiting the United Nations largest peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo – a country where a decade-long war starting in the mid-1990s claimed some five million lives. Today, the UN plays a critical role in contributing to the maintenance of a fragile peace in Congo. I visited bases in North and South Kivu from which UN peacekeepers patrol the surrounding areas, and assist in disarming militias. I toured a UN camp where child soldiers are being demobilized and reintegrated into their communities.

My trip to the DRC provided me with a powerful demonstration of the UN at its best: how it can help prevent conflict, keep the peace, go where nobody else will go to care for the neediest of the world, and promote universal values that Americans hold dear. However, I also saw an organization struggling to do its critical work in more effective ways. There is ample room for improvement, from how troops are trained and equipped, to how complicated missions staff up and draw down. As the Ambassador for UN Management and Reform, my job is to ensure that US taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, and I recognize that opportunities and challenges abound in making the UN a more efficient, transparent and accountable institution.

As the largest financial contributor to the United Nations, we put budget discipline at the forefront of our efforts to ensure that the UN is constantly seeking ways to do more with less. Last December, we kept the increase in US assessments below two percent compared to 4 percent or higher in biennia past, even in the face of new commitments such as responding to the Ebola crisis. We further set a budget

planning figure for the next biennium that is 1.6 percent lower than the current level. This followed a significant reduction in the staffing level during the previous budget period, the first such action in almost twenty years.

Equally as important as controlling the topline is ensuring fairness in how much we are required to pay to the United Nations. This means first and foremost protecting the 22 percent ceiling on the regular budget, as that ceiling not only lowers our rate on the regular budget, but also our starting point on the far larger peacekeeping budget. Nevertheless, we are committed to paying our UN dues on time and in full, and we will be working hard this fall during the scales of assessments negotiations to ensure that all countries pay their fair share.

Additionally, we continue to promote long term structural savings in UN budgets through innovation, including through new IT systems that will enable the UN to modernize its approach to functions such as procurement, human resources, finance, and supply chain management. A recent change we secured in procurement methodology, for example, will enable the UN to get better value on its \$700 million worth of annual air contracts. And we are pleased to note that an American company was one of the first to win a contract under the new rules. We have pushed these reforms as an important means of achieving substantial UN headcount reductions and cost savings from the streamlining of business processes.

We also have worked hard to ensure that UN staff costs are more in line with the US federal government –because the UN uses the U.S. government’s pay scale as basis of comparison. To that end, we have achieved freezes in UN pay and benefits, a powerful lever for budget control since staff costs comprise more than 70 percent of the UN’s budget.

We have also focused on ways to make peacekeeping operations more effective, such as promoting the Global Field Support Strategy, a move to shared services for peacekeeping missions that has led to at least \$250 million in savings. As a result of this and other initiatives, the cost per UN uniformed peacekeeper has been reduced by 17 percent since 2008, when adjusted for inflation. We continually keep UN missions under review to ensure they are right-sized, and seize the opportunity to drawdown when appropriate, as will occur this year in peacekeeping missions in Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia and the UN’s emergency response to Ebola (UNMEER), among other missions.

We also press the UN to be more transparent and accountable. We achieved a significant increase in transparency in December by making permanent the public disclosure of UN audit and inspection reports of the various programs so that all taxpayers can see how their money is being spent. We continue to seek to strengthen the Inspector General of the UN called the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) by providing the resources and personnel needed to effectively fulfill its oversight role in headquarters and in the field.

However, we recognize that our efforts at reform will be diminished unless we ensure the UN's integrity: too often, incidents of fraud, abuse and mismanagement undermine the organization's important work by hurting the very people the UN is supposed to be protecting, and damaging public support for the UN. We continue to push the UN to address misconduct issues, especially sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), to ensure that effective processes are in place for prevention and accountability. We supported the establishment of an office to improve the evaluation of the performance and readiness of peacekeeping units in the field. We also continue to work with the UN to strengthen its whistleblower protection policies and how they can implement those policies more robustly.

Reform can succeed at the UN, even though the pace is frustratingly slow. But we owe it to U.S. taxpayers and to the billions of people who depend, many for their lives, on crucial UN services to push for change.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions you may have.