

Statement of Joel Danies
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and the
Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
December 19, 2017

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and Members of the Committee: It is an honor to appear before you today. I am grateful to President Trump and to Secretary Tillerson for the confidence that they have placed in me as their nominee to be Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and also the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe. If confirmed, I will be honored to work with you and other Members of Congress to protect and advance U.S. interests in both countries.

Throughout my 30 years in the Foreign Service I focused on developing the skills required to promote U.S. interests globally and to effectively implement U.S. foreign policy objectives. I have worked to increase respect for human rights, identify U.S. trade opportunities, and promote adherence to the rule of law for the well-being and security of local and American citizens. If confirmed, I look forward to promoting our interests and democratic values in Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe and to encouraging both countries to contribute to a vibrant and prosperous region.

I would not be where I am today without the enduring love and support of my family and I am joined today by:

Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe have been relatively peaceful and stable since their independence. U.S. policy priorities are clear for both countries: (1) protecting U.S. lives and interests; (2) strengthening democratic institutions and improving governance; (3) enhancing trade and economic opportunities; and (4) ensuring peace, security, and stability.

In Gabon, our priorities remain to encourage the process of democratization, increase good governance, and improve increased transparency. If confirmed, I will engage government leaders, opposition parties, and civil society to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms, and urge Gabon to stay on a path to democracy.

Gabon's economy has been affected by falling oil prices leading to increased activity in the agriculture, fisheries, and timber sectors. These are areas in which U.S. knowledge and experience can contribute positively. If confirmed, I will tirelessly promote U.S. values and business interests, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of U.S. companies for a level playing field in Gabon.

Gabon is a country located on the strategic Gulf of Guinea. If confirmed, I will work closely with the government as well as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) headquartered in Libreville, to promote regional security cooperation in this vital region by leveraging partnerships with U.S. forces.

Gabon is an important partner in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a multilateral public/private initiative for addressing regional concerns, including deforestation and wildlife trafficking. If confirmed, I will continue to advance our shared work on sustained natural resource stewardship that denies revenues to transnational criminal organizations.

The other country to which I am nominated to serve as Ambassador, the small island state of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), has a vibrant political scene but faces severe budgetary constraints that have hampered the dividends of democracy.

U.S. national interests are served by São Tomé's strategic location in the Gulf of Guinea and its respect for democracy. São Tomé has been a reliable partner, hosting since 1992 a Voice of America relay station that covers much of Africa. It has also encouraged U.S. investment and, as a result, a U.S. company began oil exploration there in 2016.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with São Tomé to improve its port security through cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as to strengthen regional security and improve bilateral trade links with the United States.

Every country's greatest hope for the future is its youth. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the young people in both countries to promote peaceful dialogue, empower women, and foster entrepreneurship to further expand the private sectors in their nations.

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and other Members of the Committee, no goal will be more important to me than protecting the lives, interests and welfare of Americans living and traveling in Gabon and São Tomé. If confirmed, I look forward to leading and fostering the development of the dynamic embassy team, including the great local staff that we have in Gabon by serving as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe. Thank you.