

Testimony of Elizabeth Cousens
Nominee to be Representative of the United States of America on the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 8, 2011

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Rubio, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. I am honored by the confidence and support that President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and Ambassador Rice have shown in nominating me for this position.

Let me also acknowledge and thank my family, my parents Frank and Sandy who unfortunately could not be here but whose love and support I value every day, my husband Bruce, who is here today, and our two-year old son Wyatt who has promised to be on his best behavior.

We are living in an era of global interconnection. The threats we face – nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organized crime, environmental degradation, and infectious disease, to name just a few – cross borders and continents freely. But so too do our opportunities, from open markets and free trade to the ability of citizens around the world to support each other's struggle for dignity, freedom, and equality. U.S. leadership to strengthen and expand our tools for international cooperation will be essential to meeting these tests and promoting U.S. interests and values in the 21st century. The United Nations is critical to that task.

The United States gains from an effective UN. When UN peacekeepers help stabilize conflict zones in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Haiti, they do so at a fraction of what it would cost to send American troops and bolster our own security. When UNICEF vaccinates 40 percent of the world's children, it contributes to the health of our own. When the World Food Program, UNHCR, and other humanitarian agencies deliver life-saving assistance to the tens of millions ravaged by famine, flood, or displacement, they strengthen our common humanity.

I have worked around the UN for most of my professional life. This has given me a concrete appreciation of the UN's potential to advance critical U.S. priorities and values as well as practical insight into the UN's strengths and limitations.

As I have seen first-hand throughout my career, the UN is far from perfect. Much more needs to be done to improve its efficiency, transparency, fiscal discipline, integrity, and impact. Key reforms spearheaded by this Administration, especially in the areas of human resources, ethics, oversight, conduct and discipline, and basic business practices need to be advanced. And no reform agenda is complete without addressing the institution's credibility gap, particularly with regard to the unfair and disproportionate targeting of Israel throughout the UN system.

However, I have also seen first-hand remarkable displays of ingenuity, commitment, and courage from UN personnel in the service of values we all espouse - a peacekeeping battalion in Haiti

that used sweat equity and spare parts to rebuild schools and roads for the community, a New Zealand civil affairs officer in Bosnia who dreamed up the idea of ethnically neutral license plates to enable Bosnia's fractured communities to move safely throughout the country without fear of reprisal, an inventive Nepalese interpreter who created a computer program to improve management systems, and the courage of UN personnel who go to work in conflict zones every day despite being targeted.

I have been proud to serve as Ambassador Rice's Principal Policy Advisor and Chief of Staff in New York for the past three years during which U.S. leadership at the United Nations has produced significant tangible victories for the United States: winning important votes condemning the human rights records of Iran, North Korea, and Burma by the largest margin ever in the General Assembly; securing Israel's inclusion in key consultative groups in New York and Geneva; gaining new access to audits from UN development agencies; and leading the establishment of UN Women and creation of an office to combat sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

If confirmed, I will seek to build on these and other achievements as U.S. Representative to ECOSOC. Drawing on my own UN experience, I will work to ensure that UN humanitarian agencies deliver for those at greatest risk, such as in the Horn of Africa where famine threatens millions and the United States has provided over \$600 million in life-saving assistance, much of it through UN partners. I will work with the leadership of UN agencies, funds, and programs and member states to press for concrete development results, from reducing child mortality and combating extreme poverty to supporting women entrepreneurs. I will continue to fight for the victims of human rights abuse, including through clear and strong condemnation of violators. I will work to strengthen the contribution of UN agencies to countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Côte d'Ivoire as they rebuild after war and claim a brighter future for their people. And I will work closely with colleagues leading the Administration's reform agenda to advance comprehensive and meaningful reform at the UN.

The United Nations has an indispensable role in promoting U.S. priorities for which U.S. leadership is essential. If confirmed, it would be an honor and a privilege to serve my country in this new capacity, and join my colleagues in working to extend U.S. leadership at and through the United Nations. I would look forward to working with the Congress, and this Committee specifically, to advance our shared priorities.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.