

**Testimony of Julie Furuta-Toy Ambassador Designate to the Republic
of Equatorial Guinea**

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

**Subcommittee on African Affairs, Global Health, Human Rights and
International Organizations**

Date October 1, 2015

Thank you very much Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is a great honor for me to appear before you this afternoon as the nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. I am grateful for the confidence that President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have placed in me. If confirmed by the Senate, I will do my best to uphold this trust and further U.S. national interests.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to introduce my son Eliot. He was born during my first tour in the Foreign Service 27 years ago in Manila, the Philippines.

Since then, I have had the honor to serve in Haiti, India, Russia, Ghana, and Norway. Such a disparate group of countries has demonstrated to me similarly disparate attitudes towards rule of law, good governance, and transparency. While serving as Deputy Chief of Mission in Ghana I am

proud to have implemented U.S. policy focused on reducing and eliminating the worst forms of child labor and trafficking in persons. Through interagency dialogue and strong support from the Department of State and U.S. Congress, we were also able to promote important educational exchanges, target assistance towards the country's impediments to growth, and support U.S. commercial interests.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the honorable members of this Committee similarly to advance U.S. interests in Equatorial Guinea. U.S. policy priorities in Equatorial Guinea are to encourage the government there to open democratic space to the opposition, increase respect for human rights and civil liberties, strengthen our commercial ties and diversify its economy, and to increase economic, health, and educational opportunities for all its citizens.

Equatorial Guinea, with a population of fewer than one million people, is located on the strategic Gulf of Guinea. Although the country is nominally a multiparty, constitutional republic, President Obiang Nguema's Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea has been in power since a military coup in 1979. The Party controls all but one seat in the Chamber of Deputies and one seat

in the Senate. Opposition political parties are severely restricted, and opposition leaders have faced harassment, intimidation and arrest.

Equatorial Guinea is the third largest producer of oil in sub-Saharan Africa, and has one of the highest per-capita income rates in Africa. Despite this, much of its population lives below the poverty level; and official corruption is widespread. Should I be confirmed, I will stress and encourage the country's leadership to respect human rights and rule of law. I will also urge that government leaders pursue multi-party democracy and facilitate the growth of a strong civil society, and I will stress that promoting transparency and ending corrupt practices are key to Equatorial Guinea's long-term growth and stability.

The United States has a robust economic relationship with Equatorial Guinea, and remains its largest trading partner. The U.S. Embassy plays a critical trade facilitation and promotion role for U.S. investors in Equatorial Guinea. U. S. oil companies are Equatorial Guinea's largest investors, and they have the lead role in oil and gas exploration and extraction. Moreover, last year Equatorial Guinea was the ninth largest African market for U.S. exports. Should I be confirmed, I will continue to work to protect the commercial interests of U.S. oil companies invested in Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Chairman, while our bilateral dialogue and engagement pays heed to Equatorial Guinea's sovereignty and traditions, we also must be frank in discussing our concerns. If confirmed, I will continue to promote U.S. interests and encourage Equatorial Guinea's further political, economic, and social development, while vigilantly protecting the safety of our embassy personnel and their families.

And, finally, if confirmed, no goal will be more important to me than protecting the lives, interests and welfare of American citizens living and traveling in Equatorial Guinea.

I promise to work closely with you and the Members of this Committee in this endeavor.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.