

Statement of Dennis Bruce Hankins
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Mali
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 26, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the
Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the next Ambassador to the Republic of Mali. I appreciate the confidence he and Secretary of State Pompeo have shown in me through this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress and staff to advance American interests in Mali.

I am supported here today by my friends and colleagues from the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs and USAID. I am proud that my son, Navy Lieutenant Danu Hankins, could be with me today. Unfortunately, my wife of 36 years, Mira, could not attend. My career in the Foreign Service began in 1984 and has led me to challenging assignments all over the world. My current assignment in Guinea has offered me the opportunity to help that country transition from the Ebola crisis and make real political, economic, and social progress. I have sought out many opportunities in countries either in, or emerging from, conflict. Postings in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania, and Haiti offered opportunities for strong diplomacy, where the effectiveness of our

policies is immediately evident. If confirmed, I would draw upon these experiences and many others to deepen U.S. – Mali ties as we continue to work towards our mutual goals of combating violent extremism, strengthening democratic governance and respect for human rights, and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Mali faces serious challenges from growing terrorist threats, increasing communal violence, a frustratingly slow peace process, and severe poverty. Despite these obstacles, Mali recently held presidential elections for the second time since the military coup in 2012. It remains a willing counterterrorism partner, and we continue our partnership to bring development and economic opportunities to its people.

Terrorists are vying for control of more territory in Mali than at any time since the 2012 crisis. Al-Qa'ida- and ISIS-affiliated groups have been expanding their areas of operational control from the north to the center. These threats are spilling over borders and destabilizing the Sahel region. While Malian security forces have a number of challenges, ultimately they must provide security throughout the country.

The United States supports reforming and strengthening these forces so they can address these threats head-on through programs such as the International Military Education and Training, Security Governance Initiative, Trans Sahara

Counterterrorism Partnership, Crisis Response Team training, and Defense Department's Joint Combined Exchange Training. These programs complement the efforts of our partners, notably France and the European Union, for whom an unstable Mali represents a direct threat, fueling terrorism, mass migration, and drug trafficking. At the same time, we continue to raise our concerns regarding serious human rights issues, including credible allegations of serious human rights violations by Malian security forces. The Government of Mali has a responsibility to extend its presence with key services, including education and health care, throughout the country to benefit all of its people.

Mali, together with its neighbors Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, have formed the G5 Sahel Joint Force, an African-led, African-owned response to terrorism and banditry that plagues the Sahel region, particularly in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso tri-border area. The United States supports this effort through bilateral support to the G5 members, pledging an initial \$60 million to the members of the Joint Force. We recognize the Joint Force is a long-term project and want to set it up for success. This means that our focus should be on not only operational support, but also law enforcement, civilian-military relations, the promotion respect for human rights, accountability, and stabilization activities. In addition to support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, we support the French-led

counterterrorism operations and efforts to build the defense capacity in Mali and its neighbors working to contain the regional threat.

Part of the reason that terrorist groups have been gaining operational space is the unacceptably slow pace of implementation of the 2015 Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. By not living up to their commitments, the signatory parties perpetuate instability that threatens the entire region.

MINUSMA, the most deadly peacekeeping mission in the UN system, is a vital element in creating enabling conditions that allow for implementation of the Algiers Accord. We provide significant contributions to MINUSMA by funding 25 percent of the mission costs, training and equipping troops deploying to MINUSMA, and providing 27 U.S. military observers for support. It is costly and dangerous. The sacrifice of so many should not be for naught.

It is ultimately the parties themselves that must show the political will to make compromises and act on their commitments. If confirmed, I will redouble our efforts, along with those of our international and regional partners, to bring the parties to action. In particular, I will focus on the actions called for by UN Security Council Resolution 2423 (2018) that include: decentralization of state services; setting up interim authorities in northern Mali; integration of at least 1,000 members of signatory armed groups into Malian security forces; joint patrols by mixed units from the signatory parties; establishment of the Northern

Development Zone; and ensuring equal and meaningful participation of women in the implementation of the peace process.

Underlying the terrorist threats and the conflict in Mali's north is the desperate poverty of the country. A growing youth population that lacks economic opportunities, corruption, ineffective governance, lack of capacity, growing instability, extreme poverty, and communal violence all contribute to challenging conditions in Mali. The United States is the largest bilateral donor to Mali, and we intend to maintain our strong partnership for development and stability. Our assistance promotes democracy and improved governance as well as increases sustainable livelihoods. USAID programs also improve maternal and child health and reduce the incidence of malaria in Mali. The United States will continue encouraging economic growth and opportunity by supporting sustainable development and increased U.S. economic investment.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work, together with our partners, to create greater stability and prosperity for Malians. I will vigorously pursue the safety and security of American citizens and advance U.S. interests in Mali. I will ensure responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars through effective leadership of U.S. Embassy Bamako's strong interagency team.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be honored to respond to any questions.