

Statement of Jeffrey J. Hawkins, Jr.
Nominee for Ambassador to the Central African Republic
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 30, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States to the Central African Republic. I thank President Obama and Secretary Kerry for entrusting me with this important responsibility. If confirmed, I will work with Congress to advance the interests of the United States in the Central African Republic.

Joining me here today are my wife, Annie, and our children, Max, five, and Alex, three. Regrettably, security conditions do not permit families to join our diplomats working in Bangui. I am deeply grateful to Annie and the boys for allowing me this opportunity to serve my country, despite the hardships and sacrifices that it will require of them.

Mr. Chairman, the Central African Republic, a Texas-sized nation in the heart of Africa, is blessed with an abundance of natural resources and a resilient and entrepreneurial population.

Sadly, however, cycles of conflict and political instability have roiled that nation for more than thirty years. Beginning in late 2012, the Central African Republic saw its latest, and worst, such cycle. Regional and ethnic conflict left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. Armed factions, including foreign groups like the heinous Lord's Resistance Army, controlled large swathes of its territory. The picture, frankly, was bleak.

Mr. Chairman, there is now reason for hope in the Central African Republic. A transitional government - with strong support from the international community and the United States Government - is taking the first, difficult steps towards peace.

If confirmed, my primary objective will be to support this process. Should this process succeed, a newly peaceful and democratic Central African Republic will face many serious challenges. We have a strong interest in CAR's success. A successful transition will help forestall a return to anarchy and atrocities on victim populations. The transition also will assist in preventing extremist and criminal

trafficking groups from using the country's ungoverned spaces for their own nefarious purposes and in reducing regional instability. A successful transition will put the people of CAR in a position to rebuild their lives and build a better nation themselves.

The people of the Central African Republic are clearly ready for a new beginning. Earlier this year, Central Africans gathered together, in grassroots consultations known as the Bangui Forum, to speak about their hopes for their nation's future. At the Forum, armed groups agreed to halt the use of child soldiers and committed to stopping violent conflict. Voter registration began in June and continues to expand throughout the country. The country's political transition will culminate later this year with a constitutional referendum and elections.

The international community provides key support to this process. In particular, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic - MINUSCA - has operated in the country since September 2014, to reinforce the transition and protect civilian populations. Nearly 10,000 UN peacekeepers and approximately 900 French troops provide a security backbone for this deployment.

The United States has made a real commitment to the positive change in the Central African Republic. Over the past two years, we have contributed over \$800 million to assist at-risk populations, underwrite the UN effort, reform the justice sector, aid the electoral process, and encourage peace building and reconciliation. In September of last year, with support of the Congress, we reopened our embassy after nearly two years; the Embassy is a vital platform for oversight of our operations and I want to recognize here the extraordinary efforts of our team on the ground in Bangui.

Mr. Chairman, we may not have a better opportunity to break the cycles of conflict in CAR. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will ensure that U.S. resources are used appropriately so that they will contribute effectively to sustainable change in the Central African Republic. I believe my deep experience in Africa, years working in post-conflict environments like Afghanistan, and strong Foreign Service leadership credentials will be useful in promoting U.S. government interests there.

In closing, I would like to express particular thanks to the outstanding team currently serving at Embassy Bangui for their courage and fortitude in leading our engagement in the Central African Republic.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today, and welcome any questions you may have.