

Statement of James Knight
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Chad
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 7, 2013

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

I am deeply honored to appear today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Chad. I thank President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the confidence and trust they have shown by nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work with you all to best represent the interests and values of the American people to the government and people of Chad, at a moment when Chad is becoming a stronger partner for the United States and its allies in a critical region.

I am pleased that my wife, Dr. Amelia Bell Knight, has joined me today. Amelia has been my closest partner and strongest supporter throughout my Foreign Service career.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, Chad is a vast country positioned at one of the most important crossroads of Africa. For many centuries the peoples and cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East have shared Chad's richly diverse environment. These differing traditions have bequeathed to Chad a unique culture, but one which has faced great tension and turbulence since its independence in 1960. Chad has been regularly plagued by civil war, and has suffered periodic struggles with Libya, Sudan, and other neighboring countries.

Today Chad is emerging from this legacy of internal turmoil and regional conflict. Its rapprochement with Sudan in 2010 has supported Chad's internal stability and the stability of the region as whole. Chad now plays a positive role in the region, contributing to regional mediation and peacekeeping efforts. Notably, Chad has been a key partner in the international community's efforts to halt extremism in Mali, participating in – and sustaining casualties in -- the international military intervention in Mali. Chad intends to maintain troops there as a key member of an eventual United Nations peacekeeping operation. In addition, Chad's leadership in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), and the Community of Sahelian States (CEN-SAD) advances the hope we all share for the future of a more prosperous and stable Sahel and central Africa.

However, ongoing instability and conflict in bordering countries, such as we are now seeing in Chad's southern neighbor, the Central African Republic (CAR), threatens the progress Chad has recently enjoyed. Chadian President Deby has led regional negotiations to achieve a broad-based and transparent transition government in the CAR, and Chad has contributed troops to the regional FOMAC peacekeeping mission there. Chad currently hosts some 373,000 refugees from Sudan and the Central African Republic, and new arrivals continue to cross the border due to ongoing conflict. The government of Chad maintains a cooperative relationship with the humanitarian community ensuring lifesaving assistance is provided to affected populations. Chad is also subject to the growing regional threat of wildlife trafficking, whereby increasingly armed poachers cross central African borders to kill a threatened elephant population, which in and of itself is a tragedy that also impacts the economic livelihoods of local communities as well as security and rule of law.

In addition to regional threats, Chad faces great domestic challenges. International investment in Chad is severely constrained by its geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, lack of appropriately skilled workers, high import duties, and widespread corruption. In particular, the government of Chad must improve its management of its petroleum resources. Chad's oil reserves are in decline, adding urgency to its need to overcome its persistent underdevelopment. While the government of Chad has expressed its commitment to strengthening human rights protections, its capacity to implement that commitment must grow. The people of Chad suffer from great poverty, illiteracy, disease, and high infant mortality. Its history of authoritarian government, punctuated by coups and civil war, complicate the consolidation of democracy, the building of Chad's capacity for good governance, and the fulfillment of Chad's economic potential.

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Members of the Committee, as you know I have worked in the Sahel and elsewhere to address these kinds of issues over many years. In Iraq, in my current assignment, I have had responsibility for refugees, development assistance, and police reform. In Benin, as Ambassador, I successfully oversaw the completion of the country's Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact, which addressed challenges similar to those confronting Chad today. In Angola, I helped Africa's second largest oil exporter and its partners improve management of its petroleum resources and revenue. Before entering the Foreign Service, I worked as a development specialist in Niger, in an area similar to northern Chad in many ways. If confirmed, I look forward to energetically addressing the strategic goals of the United States in a wider and fuller partnership with the government and people of Chad. In particular, I will

support the government of Chad's efforts to counter the growing threats to regional security and to maintain and widen its regional engagement. I will encourage and support the government of Chad's pursuit of democratic reform, its capacity and will to implement better governance, and its respect for human rights. I will support and assist the government of Chad and the international community to assure sound use of humanitarian assistance and improved capacity in the area of disaster management. If confirmed, my highest priorities as the Ambassador of the United States will be to ensure the safety and welfare of all Americans in Chad and the advancement of U.S. interests.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, please accept my thanks for this opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.