

Testimony of Jessica Lapenn
Ambassadorial Nominee to the African Union
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to be the President's nominee for the position of the U.S. Ambassador to the African Union and Representative to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. I am grateful for the trust and confidence the President and Secretary Pompeo have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to advance our nation's interests at these institutions.

My parents, Joyce and Jim Lapenn, are with me today – as they have been every step of my career for the last almost twenty-five years. In country after country, they have visited me and often volunteered in local organizations, helping me to more fully reflect American values of service, generosity, and partnership.

I'm not joined today by my ten-year-old son Jasper, who has fully shared in my Foreign Service life. Indeed, he has lived more than half his life on the African continent. Unfortunately for me, Jasper isn't here because he's at summer camp, reconnecting to American life.

Today is significant for me. I entered the Foreign Service for both the "Foreign" and the "Service." I was attracted by the prospects of foreign experiences and by the opportunities for meaningful service, and I have found both in equal measure over nearly a quarter of a century in posts in the Middle East, the United Nations, Washington, DC, and Africa. Across my posts, I have had the privilege to represent and advance vital American security, economic, and political interests. From Jerusalem to Johannesburg, I have strived to do so in a way that communicated shared American values and in service to the American people. If confirmed by this body, my service in Addis Ababa would be defined and shaped by these experiences.

The African Union (AU) is a unique and influential forum that brings together all 55 member states to discuss and take action on the continent's foremost issues, and to formulate and establish standards by which all members can hold each other accountable. It is a forum where our voice needs to be heard.

If confirmed, I would focus on three key priorities: *expanding trade and investment opportunities; advancing peace and security; and supporting democracy, human rights, and good governance across the continent.*

One of Africa's greatest assets is its youth. An estimated 70 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population is under the age of 30. Economic transformation is essential to ensure that Africa's youth is an asset, not a vulnerability.

Only the private sector can generate the jobs that young Africans need and want. By helping American business and investment succeed in Africa, we can foster prosperity on the continent and here at home. From the passage by this body of the BUILD Act to the recent rollout of Prosper Africa, the United States has expanded its tool-kit for economic engagement with Africa, and we have done so in stark contrast to the more predatory debt diplomacy of other countries.

The recent establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents an exciting opportunity for African governments to reduce trade barriers and increase trade and investment, and the AU will be at the center of its implementation. If confirmed, my leadership of the U.S. Mission to the African Union will focus on building bridges between the U.S. and African private sectors, reducing barriers to American investment, and fostering entrepreneurship to deepen and expand U.S.-Africa trade and investment.

If confirmed, I will also prioritize advancing peace and security. Fragility and ongoing conflicts in Africa threaten global and U.S. national security. They stifle economic growth, enable the spread of radical extremism and pandemic disease, and trigger destabilizing migration flows. The African Union has made significant strides to prevent, respond to, and resolve armed conflict and to counter transnational threats. Over the past decade plus, the AU, sub-regional organizations, and AU member states have played a key role as first responders to

regional conflicts, and we have been with them throughout. We have provided capacity building in peacekeeping and counterterrorism and supported almost all current and past AU-sanctioned operations. Because of U.S. support, Africans now comprise more than 60 percent of peacekeepers on the continent, up from 40 percent just ten years ago. If confirmed, I intend to continue building and integrating the AU's counterterrorism and conflict prevention capabilities.

Finally, if confirmed, I will work with the AU to encourage democracy and good governance practices, which are critical for peace, security, and sustained economic growth. Our shared commitment to democratic principles – including open and accountable governance; credible elections and peaceful transitions of power; respect for human rights and the rule of law; and expanding access to justice – are the foundation of the United States and African Union's excellent relationship. If confirmed, I will work to facilitate frank dialogue around these goals – which will necessarily entail communicating clearly to AU members the need for inclusive and transparent democratic processes that include civil society and youth participation.

The outstanding USAU team in Addis is dedicated to partnering with the African Union and its member states to ensure a secure and prosperous future for the continent's 1.3 billion people and to deepening U.S.-African ties. If confirmed, I will look forward to leading their efforts.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.