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U.S. Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Guinea
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea.

For my family and me, this is another milestone in our American journey and our American dream, both of which began in the chaos of post-World War II Greece. My presence here today is made possible by the land of opportunity that embraced my late father in 1946 and my mother in 1960.

I approach an assignment in the Republic of Guinea – if confirmed – knowing that Guinea has sent a large number of immigrants to the United States ... originally via the horrors of the African slave trade, but later in the manner of my parents, young people seeking better lives for themselves and their future children. A walk down 125th Street in Harlem shows part of a prospering and vibrant Guinean-American community with which I will be engaged, if confirmed. Together with this diaspora, a large community of returned Peace Corps Volunteers, former missionaries and other dedicated Americans serve as committed advocates for Guinean-American relations and for the welfare of the Republic of Guinea.

My first exposure to the African continent was a two year stint as a volunteer high school teacher in a township parochial school in Galeshewe, South Africa. It was 1989 and 1990, and in those two years, I lived the miraculous democratic transition led by men and women of goodwill; as hitch-hiking was my only means of travel, I missed Namibian independence by a few days, but still managed to absorb the career lesson that even the most momentous political changes can take place peacefully and democratically.

My first exposure to the Republic of Guinea was quite the opposite from the inspiration of South Africa. I arrived in Monrovia, Liberia – my first Foreign Service posting in 1991 – as the countries of the Mano River Union were falling into chaos and violence. The Guinea I first encountered was host to some one million Liberian refugees; its armed forces served in the West African peacekeeping force, known as the Economic Community of West African State Monitoring Group or ECOMOG; and its government sought to avoid the abyss from which Liberia and Sierra Leone are only now emerging.

This experience suggests to me that – if confirmed – I will be working in a country that both supports us and needs our support. The Republic of Guinea has recently been in the headlines for the best reasons – real

democratic progress after a succession of dictators – but the story behind the headlines reveals the longstanding social and economic challenges that impoverish the country and stymie its development.

My experience in a number of African conflicts tells me that past performance is indeed an indicator of future performance when it comes to countries emerging from dictatorship and civil conflict. To break the cycle, to keep the Republic of Guinea from lapsing back into authoritarianism, we need to be part of the architecture of democracy, supporting all three branches of government plus free media and civil society. We need engagement with the military to professionalize the force and bring it firmly, irrevocably under elected civilian authority. We need to be engaged in poverty relief and disease eradication, as well as in responsible mineral exploitation and sustainable agriculture.

The Republic of Guinea achieved a landmark election in 2010, its first free and fair democratic presidential campaign. President Alpha Conde, who spent decades advocating for democratic change, emerged as Guinea's first-ever democratically-elected head of state, ending 50-years of despotic rule and military repression. However, Guinea's transition to a fully functioning democracy will not be complete until the long-anticipated legislative elections are held. I do not need to remind this chamber on the

importance of the legislative branch to sustainable democracy; if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than helping Guinea to seat a new legislature and then motivating that branch of government to fulfill its critical institutional role.

In the Republic of Guinea, we have a willing but technically-limited partner on regional and international issues. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Guinea on a coordinated approach to regional crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau; I will do my best to strengthen cooperation on counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics issues, as well as other forms of transnational crimes, such as trafficking in persons and money laundering. I will also make promoting the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens my highest priority and seek out commercial opportunities for U.S. companies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Guinea. I am happy to answer any questions.