

**Statement of Mary Beth Leonard**  
**Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Mali**  
**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**October 5, 2011**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Isakson, Members of the Committee: It is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Mali. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary of State have shown by nominating me to this position, and for the support of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson.

First, Mr. Chairman, let me acknowledge several family members and friends and colleagues who are like family here today.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading Embassy Bamako in advancing U.S. interests in Mali, a constitutional democracy rooted in the principles of free expression and tolerance that offers an example for West Africa and beyond; these qualities make Mali a valued partner for the United States. Our main interests in Mali lie in: consolidating that democracy; furthering economic development; and countering the incursion of terrorism that threatens Mali's physical security as well as its most cherished ideals.

Mali is poised to enter a new era in its democratic journey. President Amadou Toumani Touré has made clear his intention to leave office at the end of his second term next June as prescribed by the constitution. If confirmed, I would look forward to shaping U.S. activities to encourage constructive popular participation in the 2012 elections and support ongoing democratic consolidation.

Mr. Chairman, the environment for addressing security challenges in the Sahel – including, but not limited to, the threat of Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists – is also evolving. Events in Libya pose delicate challenges for this near-neighbor, as it ponders the possible impact of combatants and weaponry leaking into an already uncertain Sahel. This prospect provides a powerful impetus for cooperation among Mali and its neighbors to safeguard the Sahel. This regional counterterrorism cooperation is an important counterpart to U.S. efforts to build the capacity of Mali's military, which I would be honored to further hone to their needs and plans if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, U.S. development efforts bring well-focused interventions in health, education, agriculture, and governance to what remains a desperately poor nation. These programs are closely integrated with our democracy and counterterrorism goals in a well-coordinated interagency effort. In decentralizing the provision of health and education, we also help Mali amplify the message at the heart of the essential contract of democracy – that a government exists to serve its

people. In the remote north of Mali – an area that faces terrorist incursions – development reinforces the tolerant Malian people’s rejection of extremism as espoused by AQIM, and strengthens the ties that bind the state with even its farthest flung citizens.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my highest priority will be the protection of Americans and American business interests, including Mission personnel, living and traveling in Mali. I would look forward to engaging U.S. businesses and non-governmental organizations on consular and security matters. The mission is fortunate to have occupied a New Embassy Compound nearly five years ago. One of the most impressive structures in Bamako, it is an important symbol of our long-term commitment to Mali. If confirmed, I would be closely engaged in ensuring the good stewardship of this significant U.S. government investment.

Mr. Chairman, I believe my Foreign Service experience to date has prepared me to serve as Ambassador to Mali. Should the Senate’s confirmation permit me to return to Bamako, where I previously served as Deputy Chief of Mission before becoming West African Affairs director, I hope that my familiarity with Malian issues and contacts would serve our interests well. Many of Mali's finest citizens make up the Locally Employed Staff at our Embassy, and it would be an honor to work with them again as Ambassador to Mali. If confirmed by the Senate, I look

forward to working closely with you and other members of the Committee, and would hope to welcome you to Bamako during my tenure.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the honor to appear before the Committee today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.