

Statement of Deborah Malac
U.S. Ambassador-designate to Liberia
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 12, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Isakson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored and pleased to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Clinton for the confidence and trust they have placed in me by nominating me for this position.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize my husband, Ron Olson, and my three children, sons Nicholas and Gregory, and daughter Katharine. I am deeply grateful for their strong and unstinting support; without it, I would not be seated here today.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, I have been privileged to spend the past 31 years as a member of the Foreign Service, working abroad and here in Washington. The majority of my Foreign Service career has been spent working in Africa and on African issues, although I started my career expecting to focus on issues such as the former Soviet Bloc and missile throw-weights. Instead, the Department of State in its infinite wisdom sent me to Cameroon, and I was hooked. That first assignment was followed by assignments to South Africa, Senegal and Ethiopia interspersed with time in Washington to work on South Africa's transition to democracy, East African issues, agricultural trade and development and food security. For the past year, I have served as the Director of the Office of East African Affairs. If confirmed, I look forward to the opportunity to return to West Africa.

Mr. Chairman, the United States and Liberia share a strong relationship rooted in our historical ties and preserved through our commitment to democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity. We have always been a friend to the Liberian people and our commitment is demonstrated through our robust foreign assistance. If confirmed, I will continue to strengthen our bilateral relationship and leverage our resources to help Liberia overcome its challenges to development.

Mr. Chairman, it has been nine years since the end of Liberia's 14-year civil war and Liberia has taken significant steps to develop democratically and economically. Last fall, Liberia held its second free, fair and transparent national election since 2003. The success of these elections demonstrated Liberia's strong commitment to democracy. As a result, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was re-elected to her second and final term, and has laid out an ambitious agenda to move Liberia forward. If confirmed, I will work to address the key U.S. priorities, which also are priorities of the Government of Liberia, and include improving the investment climate, increasing access to education, reducing the unemployment rate, and encouraging reconciliation.

Through a \$15 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Threshold program, Liberia is taking the right steps to advance development and economic growth. Liberia's Threshold Program focuses on improving land rights and access, increasing girls' primary education enrollment and retention, and improving Liberia's trade policy and practices. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government of Liberia to encourage progress on its MCC Scorecard indicators so that Liberia can be eligible for a MCC Compact in the near future.

Though significant progress has been made, Liberia still faces many challenges. Liberia remains one of the most impoverished countries in the world, with most Liberians having limited access to health care, education, or other government services. There is, however, growing investor interest in Liberia and over the past several years Liberia has negotiated nearly \$16 billion in foreign investment. If confirmed, I will leverage our existing resources, most notably our robust USAID programming, to help the Government of Liberia ensure that all Liberians have access to basic rights and services. I will also encourage the Government of Liberia to continue to create an environment conducive to business and investment, as sustained economic growth is key to reducing poverty and stabilizing the country.

Preserving security in Liberia is a priority of both the Liberian and U.S. governments. The UN Secretary-General has recommended reducing the United Nations Mission in Liberia's (UNMIL) troop levels from 7,900 to 3,750 over three years while increasing the UN police levels by up to three Formed Police Units. The United States has been a major player in security sector reform and will

continue this role when UNMIL's reconfiguration takes place. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Liberia to encourage it to take the necessary steps to continue to build the capacity of its security sector. It will be important that the United States, Liberia, and UNMIL and other donor countries work closely together so that when a reconfiguration does occur, the gradual handover of security responsibility from UNMIL to Liberia will be handled properly.

Addressing reconciliation will also be important to the future stability of Liberia. The conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor for his role in the Sierra Leone civil war brings to the forefront the need for Liberia to address the wounds left open from its own civil war. President Sirleaf is committed to reconciliation and has appointed fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee to lead Liberia's new national reconciliation initiative. As this process moves ahead, it will be important that all Liberians participate actively and have their voices heard. As a partner, the United States can play a supportive role, offering technical or logistical support to the Government of Liberia's efforts. We understand, however, that this process must be Liberian-led and Liberian-owned.

Lastly, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the protection of Americans and American business interests, including Mission personnel, living and traveling in Liberia.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you 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 Liberia. I am happy to answer any questions.