

Testimony of Earl Miller
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Botswana
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 29, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next Ambassador to the Republic of Botswana. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Kerry have placed in me by putting my name forward for your consideration. I am also deeply grateful for the support of my wife, Ana, and sons, Andrew and Alexander. Our first overseas assignment in the Foreign Service was in Botswana, a country we loved dearly.

During my twenty-seven years in the Foreign Service, as both a diplomat and federal law enforcement officer, I have had the privilege of serving in senior leadership positions at a variety of challenging posts. The success of our diplomacy depends on our people. If confirmed, I will make it my highest priority to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of our mission employees and all Americans in Botswana. Over the past three years, as the U.S. Consul General in Johannesburg, South Africa, I managed the rapid growth of one of our busiest regional support and training centers. Our multi-agency Consulate General in Johannesburg is now larger than many U.S. embassies in Africa, an expansion reflecting, in particular, our growing economic partnership with Southern Africa.

Mr. Chairman, there is nowhere I would rather serve than Botswana. It is one of Africa's great success stories. It is one of the continent's longest-standing multi-party democracies. Botswana has also been one of the United States' most reliable partners in Africa.

Our current engagement with Botswana, across a range of issues, underscores the country's potential as a regional, and in some instances, global, partner for the United States. Our health partnership, particularly our joint efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, has made a world-wide contribution to the global evidence base on HIV treatment and prevention. The Botswana Combination Prevention Project that our two countries launched in late 2013 is an important component of the President's commitment through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to achieve an AIDS-free generation. If confirmed, I would draw on my significant law enforcement experience to be a strong advocate for the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Botswana, a partnership

between our two nations that trains police officials from 34 African countries, and has made a significant contribution to our continent-wide efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, protect human rights, combat wildlife trafficking, and advance peace and security. Botswana also hosts the International Broadcasting Bureau's Voice of America relay station, serving most of the African continent.

Botswana has worked with us to promote democracy, good governance and human rights throughout the continent. It has regularly taken principled stands on these issues at the United Nations, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community. Botswana also has a strong military-to-military relationship with the United States. If confirmed, as both a former Marine Corps officer and senior diplomat who has worked closely with U.S. and host government armed forces around the world, I would prioritize further strengthening these ties. The Botswana Defense Force's (BDF's) current leadership is U.S.-trained and does not shy away from partnering with the United States. The BDF is one of the continent's strongest supporters of AFRICOM. Last year, Botswana approved the basing of an Air Force C-12 in Gaborone, and in the first nine months, the C-12 team supported missions within the region.

There are significant economic ties between the United States and Botswana. The United States imports between 200 and 300 million dollars of goods and services from Botswana every year and is the top purchaser of polished diamonds, which form over 70 percent of Botswana's exports. Botswana has many key assets that U.S. investors look for: stability, a reputation for transparency, respect for rule of law, and generally favorable investment conditions.

The Southern African Development Community, or SADC, is headquartered in Gaborone, Botswana. Botswana is influential in this group of fifteen southern African nations. If confirmed, I will serve as the United States' representative to SADC. Regional integration and cooperation are essential to the long-term stability and prosperity of all of Southern African nations. I would look forward to exploring appropriate opportunities to work with SADC to promote these objectives.

Finally, Botswana is a regional leader and strong partner on conservation and environmental issues. On challenges such as managing regional water supplies, sustainable growth and combating wildlife trafficking – a serious and growing problem across the continent – Botswana is in many respects an impressive model. The Government of Botswana has taken on a leadership role

within southern Africa on wildlife trafficking. In late 2013, we partnered with the Botswana government in organizing the Gaborone Wildlife Enforcement Network conference, which resulted in ten southern African nations recommending formation of the Wildlife Enforcement Network of Southern Africa (WENSA), a regional anti-wildlife trafficking entity. We are working with Botswana's Ministry of Environment, Wildlife, and Tourism on a follow-up conference, which we hope will take place later this year, aimed at drafting and finalizing the WENSA's foundational documents.

Despite Botswana's impressive development history, the country confronts serious challenges. Botswana's HIV prevalence rate of 25.4 percent among 15-49 year olds is the second highest in the world. Our investment of more than \$700 million through PEPFAR over the past ten years has aided the government of Botswana in its response to HIV/AIDs. Botswana's epidemic has reached a tipping point – for every one new person on treatment, there is less than one person newly infected. But many challenges remain.

The decline in diamond reserves constitutes Botswana's greatest strategic challenge since independence. Diamond revenues, though well-managed in Botswana, constitute the largest source of government revenue and are used to improve the lives of its people. As diamond resources dwindle, the country must find an alternate source of revenue or face a severe economic downturn. If Botswana fails to meet this challenge, it could upend the country's development trajectory and severely constrain Botswana's capacity to cope with health challenges associated with one of the world's highest HIV prevalence rates. This could put the sustainability of our \$700 million PEPFAR investment at risk, make it difficult for Botswana to sustainably manage its globally-significant natural resources, particularly the Okavango Delta and its wildlife, and undercut Botswana's influence in the region.

Botswana's current diamond-wealth translates into a \$6,200 GDP per capita, relatively high for a developing country. Despite this high GDP rate, Botswana suffers from income inequality, poverty, high unemployment, aging infrastructure, and a need for a more skilled labor market. The top 20 percent of income earners in Botswana account for 70 percent of the country's household consumption, while over one fifth of Botswana's population lives on less than \$1.25 per day. In Botswana's remote rural communities, poverty is particularly acute; in the least populated district, nearly one in two people are impoverished with no realistic prospects for living standard improvement on the horizon. Women are disproportionately affected by HIV, and gender-based violence is a serious

problem.

Botswana is a strong and vocal partner of the United States today because of strong relationships forged 20 years ago in universities, military academies, and through programs such as the Peace Corps. If I am confirmed, I will build on these types of relationships with the rising generation of Botswana. Youth make up the largest segment of Botswana's population: over half of the population is under age 25. The United States is viewed positively by Botswana's youth, which opens important opportunities for us to influence the next generation of Botswana's leaders.

The United States is keenly interested in Botswana remaining a strong, stable, and reliable American partner. Botswana has consistently been successful, a source of hope for others, and an example of what is possible in Africa, and why it matters. If confirmed, my goal would be to work to enhance Botswana's potential and support the country as it seeks to address its economic, environmental, and health challenges. These goals require robust diplomatic, development, and defense engagement on our part.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.