

Statement of Mary Catherine Phee
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 20, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Minority Member, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to be President Biden's nominee for the post of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence.

I began my career as a public servant here in the office of Senator Pat Moynihan. To guide his work, Senator Moynihan kept only two documents on his desk: the U.S. constitution and the UN Charter. He inspired my career in the Foreign Service, and taught me an abiding respect for this institution, and this committee.

My career in foreign policy began in Nairobi, Kenya, at the United Nations Environment Program. In Kenya I was introduced to the talent and generosity of the African people, and the beauty and richness of the African landscape. Kenyan politics were also my first exposure to the enduring challenges of governance, security and sustainable development. Applying U.S. diplomacy to effectively meet such challenges has been the dominant theme of my career.

I thank this committee for its bipartisan recognition of the growing political, economic and cultural power of the diverse countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It is up to the State Department to translate this recognition into respectful partnerships that advance our shared interests, values and aspirations. If confirmed, I will work to support President Biden's agenda to expand the quantity and quality of our engagement with African governments, institutions such as the African Union, and, critically, African publics.

To stand up to the threat of autocracy, the President has charged us with demonstrating that democracy is the best system to meet the challenges of our interconnected world. We know that the majority of Africans agree and are raising their voices to set new destinies for their countries, as we see in Nigeria. The bravery of the Sudanese people in demanding a civilian-led government is another extraordinary example. Across the continent we will reinvigorate our focus on human rights, accountability, and good governance. President Biden has declared the fight against corruption, especially the theft of public assets for private gain, to be a core national security interest.

We see a direct correlation between African governments that are authoritarian and the incidence of internal conflict, displacement, and migration. Many are contending with an active threat from the Islamic State and other violent extremists like al-Shabaab in Somalia. Diverse societies struggle to uphold inclusive and equitable power-sharing arrangements. In collaboration with regional and international partners, tailored U.S. diplomatic, development and security assistance can play a critical role to support peace and security. This imperative is driving our current intensive effort to urge all parties to the conflict in Ethiopia to implement an immediate and unconditional ceasefire that puts a halt to atrocities against civilians, to permit the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to restore stability through political dialogue.

Climate change also threatens stability. Desertification in the Sahel disrupts farming and has displaced hundreds of thousands, and reckless exploitation threatens the world's second largest rainforest in the Congo Basin and the continent's wonderland of biological diversity. It is in our mutual interests to work together on environmental sustainability.

Africa is the fastest growing and the youngest continent. By 2050, one in four persons in the world will be African. Workforce development and job creation will be necessary to tap the ambitions of the youth bulge. We are committed to expanding two-way trade and investment and to advancing the regional goals of the African Continental Free Trade Area. Among other strengths, the U.S. private sector offers innovative American options for green energy and digital economies, as well as a commitment to social responsibility.

All these priorities are now threatened by the devastating human toll of COVID-19. Consistent with America's generous tradition of investment in Africa's health systems, exemplified by the landmark PEPFAR program, the White House has just announced the donation of 25 million COVID-19 vaccines for Africa. Earlier the President committed the United States to providing 500 million Pfizer vaccine doses to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, for distribution by COVAX to 92 low- and lower middle-income countries and economies, and the African Union. The Development Finance Corporation is also investing in vaccine production in South Africa and Senegal. This pandemic highlights how our fates are intertwined.

Mindful of the challenges at home and humble about the challenges in Africa, our best asset will be a dynamic and affirmative U.S. policy agenda that enlists African partners in building free market democracies that offer liberty and prosperity and realize the continent's full potential. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Minority Member, with the Strategic Competition Act you have given us our marching orders and new tools. If confirmed I commit that U.S. embassies in sub-Saharan Africa will act to confront the Chinese challenge to the international rules-based order.

Finally, and not least, if confirmed I promise to be a champion of the people of the State Department's Africa bureau, to unleash their full potential with a vigorous commitment to diversity and inclusion and to cultivate the special esprit d'corps that has traditionally defined the bureau.

Thank you.