

**NOMINATION HEARINGS OF THE
115TH CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION**

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—
JANUARY 3, 2017 TO JANUARY 3, 2018
—

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



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NOMINATIONS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2017

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m. in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeff Flake, presiding.

Present: Senators Flake, Isakson, Shaheen, Kaine, and Booker.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF FLAKE, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

Senator FLAKE. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Today, the committee will consider the nomination of two experienced career Foreign Service officers to be U.S. Ambassadors to Rwanda and Gabon.

Economic growth in Rwanda has averaged 7.6 percent per year over the past decade, which we will get after we pass this tax bill. Right? [Laughter.]

Senator FLAKE. No, okay.

And it has gone from ranking 56th place to 41st place in the World Bank's 2018 Doing Business report.

Yet, a number of constraints on foreign investment in Rwanda persist. The donor aid remains a key source of funding for the country's development and economic growth initiatives, and concerns persist about the state of Rwanda's electoral process with the Trump administration recently criticizing irregularities with the country's presidential election last August, which saw President Paul Kagame, elected to his first term in 2003, handily win reelection here. Kagame was cleared to run for an additional term following a constitutional referendum that exempted him from presidential term limits.

Now, in Gabon, declining oil prices have led to economic challenges for an economy dominated by oil. Despite Gabon's President Bongo working to diversify the economy, private sector firms still face challenges to impede investment in the country, which is thought to have significant deposits of iron, diamonds, and gold, among other minerals.

Gabon is a key player in peacekeeping efforts in Central Africa and like Rwanda, has committed peacekeepers to a variety of missions. This is an issue that we have talked about in our office in terms of peacekeeping, and it is important in terms of these countries and their contributions.

I thank each of you for your time, for sharing your expertise. I also want to thank the family members who are in attendance and those who are not who continue to make sacrifices to support the work that you do for your country.

With that, let me turn it to Senator Booker for comments before we get to the witnesses.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CORY BOOKER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for your opening remarks and your unbounded optimism about the United States of America.

I am just going to submit my statement for the record.

I just really want to say thank you both. Reading your bios and knowing the strategic importance of places to which you are being nominated to represent the United States of America, you are great patriots that have served with incredible careers. I see a lot of people that look suspiciously like family members. I hope you will take some time to introduce us to your families who also make a tremendous sacrifice for their country and support you in your essential work on our behalf and, frankly, not just our behalf but on behalf of humanitarian issues, democratic issues, dealing with international diseases. It is tremendous the work that you all are doing. So thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Senator Booker's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR CORY BOOKER

Thank you for holding this hearing Mr. Chairman and thank you to our witnesses for being here today and for willing to take on these posts. We often don't thank our career foreign service officers for their service.

But indeed, you are expected to spend years abroad, away from family and friends here in the States. As Senator Flake mentioned, you have served in many corners of the world—Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Israel—working to promote U.S. priorities and relationships. You have also developed specialties in your fields, as expert negotiators and managers, which I know will be invaluable to the posts to which you will hopefully be deployed very soon.

You are also going to strategically important countries, especially in the context of peacekeeping operations. Both Gabon and Rwanda contribute to U.N. and African led peacekeeping missions.

We were reminded of the heavy price peacekeepers and their countries pay after last week's attack on U.N. peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both countries will play important roles especially as the continent aims to raise sustainable African resources for peace keeping operations on the continent.

Thank you again for your service. Thank you for being here. I look forward to your testimonies and to your response.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Senator Booker.

Senator Isakson, do you have anything to say before we get started?

Senator ISAKSON. Have we had the testimony yet?

Senator FLAKE. No.

Senator ISAKSON. Let us hear from the witnesses.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Our first nominee is Ambassador Vrooman who most recently served as Chargé and Deputy of Chief of Mission in Ethiopia. Prior postings include New Delhi, Baghdad, Tel Aviv, Beirut, Djibouti, and U.S. Liaison Office in Somalia.

Our second nominee is Joel Danies, who is currently the Associated Dean of the School of Professional and Area Studies at the Foreign Service's Institute. In addition to serving as Special Envoy for Haiti, his prior assignments include Kabul, Geneva, Paris, and Sanaa.

With that, we recognize Mr. Vrooman.

**STATEMENT OF PETER HENDRICK VROOMAN, OF NEW YORK,
TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC
OF RWANDA**

Mr. VROOMAN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Booker, members of the committee, Senator Isakson, it is an honor to appear today before you as the nominee as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. I thank President Trump and Secretary Tillerson for the trust they have placed in me by nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Rwanda.

I would like to particularly recognize my wife Johnette, a former Peace Corps volunteer and photographer, and our children, Zarah and Hendrick, who are here. Without their love and strength and support, I would not be here.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Chairman, I think that is a foul. They really need to identify themselves.

Senator FLAKE. Yes, raise your hand there. There is the family. Okay.

Senator BOOKER. And who is the person charitably married to you, sir?

Mr. VROOMAN. I think she is parking at Union Station. [Laughter.]

Senator FLAKE. I thank the family for being here.

Mr. VROOMAN. My mother Sally is also here from upstate New York. Her encouragement first propelled me into the field of foreign affairs, from my time as a Rotary International Foundation scholar and ambassador of good will in 1986 to an ambassadorial nominee here today.

My brother Eric has traveled from Minnesota to be here, and my other brother Bruce is watching from New Hampshire. My mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and brothers-in-law and our extended family are here joining me as well today. So we have a full house.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Rwanda, my first priority will be to ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens in Rwanda, whether they are representing our country as diplomats in our mission, whether they are representing our—working in NGOs or faith-based organizations, conducting business, traveling on vacation, or working in the Peace Corps.

My four policy goals will be to, one, sustain our development partnership while reducing Rwanda's aid dependency; two, promoting U.S. exports and business ties; three, advancing rule of law and human rights in Rwanda; and four, encouraging Rwanda's continued role in peacekeeping.

The United States has a strong partnership with Rwanda. The Rwandan people have crossed many milestones in their trajectory

of recovery, reconciliation, and rebuilding since the 1994 genocide. In the past 10 years, Rwanda lifted more than 1 million of its 11 million people out of poverty and doubled per capita GDP in that same period. Since the year 2000, Rwanda has reduced its budgetary reliance on foreign assistance from 86 percent to 35.

Rwanda has worked hard to meet the basic needs of the population for potable water, roads, primary education, and health care. And, for example, Rwanda's focus on combating the HIV epidemic—I was at the PEPFAR conference just this week—has resulted in a reduction of new HIV infections by more than 50 percent. Maternal and under-5 mortality has also dropped by more than 50 percent in the last decade. These and other critical gains in the health sector have occurred with support from our foreign assistance, including PEPFAR, USAID's maternal and child health programs, and the work of Peace Corps volunteers in rural communities.

Rwanda also encourages private sector investment. And we have been, over time, the largest investor in Rwanda, and U.S. citizens are its largest source of tourism outside the East Africa region. U.S. companies are bringing innovative ideas in water treatment, energy generation, aviation, logistics to Rwanda, creating jobs in both of our countries. If confirmed, I will promote a Rwanda that remains open to U.S. business, trade, and investment as it pursues continued economic growth.

Respect for human rights and democratic practices remain areas of great importance to our bilateral relationship. They are critical for Rwanda's continued prosperity, regional leadership, and partnership with the United States.

If confirmed, I will work with the Rwandan Government and civil society to encourage a Rwanda that adheres to the democratic ideals enshrined in its own constitution, and these include the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights, pluralistic democracy, equitable power sharing, tolerance, and resolution of issues through dialogue.

As noted, Senators, Rwanda is one of the most committed countries to international peacekeeping. It is the fifth largest contributor of troops, the second largest of police units to UN peacekeeping operations around the world. And Rwandan peacekeepers have served with distinction in many of the world's most complicated trouble spots from the Central African Republic to Haiti, South Sudan, and the Sudan. Rwanda championed the Kigali Principles on Protection of Civilians, a set of best practices for protecting civilians in times of armed conflict and during the deployment of peacekeeping operations. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage Rwanda to play a positive role in peacekeeping in Africa and beyond and within the African Union as President Kagame assumes the role of chairperson of the African Union for 1 year beginning in January 2018.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Booker, and members of the committee, Senator Isakson, for the opportunity and honor to appear before you today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

[Mr. Vrooman's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PETER VROOMAN

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Booker, and 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 Rwanda. I thank President Trump and Secretary Tillerson for the trust they have placed in me by nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Rwanda.

I would like to recognize my wife, Johnette, and our children, Zarah and Hendrick, who are here today. Without their love, strength, and support, I would not be here. My mother, Sally, is here too, from upstate New York. Her encouragement first propelled me into the field of foreign affairs, from my time as a Rotary International Foundation "ambassador of goodwill" in 1986 to a junior Foreign Service Officer in 1991 and an ambassadorial nominee today. My brother, Eric, has travelled from Minneapolis to be here, and my other brother, Bruce, is watching from New Hampshire.

If confirmed, my first priority will be to ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens in Rwanda, whether they are representing our country as diplomats, working in NGOs or faith-based organizations, conducting business, traveling on vacation, or serving in the Peace Corps. My goals will be to sustain our development partnership while reducing Rwanda's aid dependency, promote U.S. exports and business ties, advance the rule of law and human rights in Rwanda, and encourage Rwanda's continued role in peacekeeping.

The United States has a strong partnership with Rwanda. The Rwandan people have crossed many milestones along the trajectory of recovery, reconciliation, and rebuilding since the horrific 1994 genocide. In the past ten years, Rwanda lifted more than one million of its 11 million citizens out of poverty and doubled per capita GDP in that same period. Since the year 2000, Rwanda has reduced its budgetary reliance on foreign assistance from 86 percent to 35 percent.

Rwanda has worked hard to meet the basic needs of its population for potable water, roads, primary education, and health care. For example, Rwanda's focus on combatting the HIV/AIDS epidemic over the past decade has resulted in a reduction of new HIV infections by almost 50 percent between 2006 and 2016. Maternal and under-five mortality have also both dropped by more than 50 percent. These and other critical gains in the health sector have occurred with support from our foreign assistance, including the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), USAID's Maternal and Child Health programs, and the work of Peace Corps volunteers in rural communities.

Rwanda encourages private sector investment. We have been the largest investor in Rwanda, and U.S. citizens are its largest source of tourism. U.S. companies are bringing innovative ideas in water treatment, energy generation, aviation, and logistics to Rwanda, creating jobs in both our countries. If confirmed, I will promote a Rwanda that remains open to U.S. business, trade, and investment as it pursues continued economic growth.

Respect for human rights and democratic practices remain areas of great importance to our bilateral relationship. They are critical for Rwanda's continued prosperity, regional leadership, and partnership with the United States. If confirmed, I will work with the Rwandan Government and civil society to encourage a Rwanda that adheres to the democratic ideals enshrined in its constitution. These include the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights, pluralistic democracy, equitable power sharing, tolerance, and resolution of issues through dialogue.

Rwanda is one of the world's most committed countries to international peacekeeping operations - the fifth-largest contributor of troops in the world and the second-largest contributor of police to international peacekeeping missions. Rwandan peacekeepers have served with distinction in many of the world's most complicated and protracted conflicts, including the Central African Republic, Haiti, South Sudan, and Sudan. Rwanda championed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, a set of best practices for protecting civilians during peacekeeping missions. If confirmed, I will encourage Rwanda to continue to play a positive role in peacekeeping in Africa and within the African Union, as President Kagame assumes the role of AU Chairperson for one year starting in January 2018.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity and honor to appear before you today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.
Mr. Danies?

STATEMENT OF JOEL DANIES, OF MARYLAND, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE GABONESE REPUBLIC, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

Mr. DANIES. Thank you, Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, Senator Isakson. It is an honor to appear before you today.

I am grateful to President Trump and to Secretary Tillerson for the confidence that they have placed in me as their nominee to be Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and also the Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe. If confirmed, I will be honored to work with you and other Members of Congress to protect and advance U.S. interests in both countries.

Throughout my 30 years in the Foreign Service, I have focused on developing the skills required to promote U.S. interests globally and to effectively implement U.S. foreign policy objectives. I have worked to increase respect for human rights, identify U.S. trade opportunities, and promote adherence to the rule of law for the well-being and security of American and local citizens. If confirmed, I look forward to promoting our interests and democratic values in Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe and to encouraging both countries to contribute to a vibrant and prosperous region.

I would not be where I am today without the enduring love and support of my family, and I am joined today by my wife Karen and my daughter Blair. Our son Judson is probably watching this from the West Coast, and some very close friends of mine have also joined us today.

Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe have been relatively peaceful and stable since their independence. U.S. policy priorities are clear for both countries: protecting U.S. lives and interests, strengthening democratic institutions and improving governance, enhancing trade and economic opportunities, and ensuring peace, security, and stability.

In Gabon, our priorities remain to encourage the process of democratization, increase good governance, and increase transparency. If confirmed, I will engage government leaders, opposition parties, and civil society to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms, and urge Gabon to stay on the path to democracy.

Gabon's economy has been affected by falling oil prices leading to increased activity in the agriculture, fisheries, and timber sectors. These are areas in which U.S. knowledge and experience can contribute positively. If confirmed, I will tirelessly promote U.S. values and business interests, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of U.S. companies for a level playing in Gabon.

Gabon is a country located on the strategic Gulf of Guinea. If confirmed, I will work closely with the government, as well as the Economic Community of Central African States, headquartered in Libreville, to promote regional security cooperation in this vital region by leveraging partnerships with U.S. forces.

Gabon is also an important partner in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, a multilateral public-private initiative for addressing

regional environmental concerns, including deforestation and wild-life trafficking. If confirmed, I will continue to advance our shared work on sustained natural resource stewardship that denies revenues to transnational criminal organizations.

The other country to which I am nominated to serve as Ambassador, the small island of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, has a vibrant political scene but faces severe budgetary constraints that have hampered the dividends of democracy.

U.S. national interests are served by Sao Tomé's strategic location in the Gulf of Guinea and its respect for democracy. Sao Tomé has been a reliable partner, hosting since 1992 a Voice of America relay station that covers much of Africa. It has also encouraged U.S. investment, and as a result, a U.S. company began oil exploration there in 2016.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with Sao Tomé to improve its port security through cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as to strengthen regional security and improve bilateral trade links with the United States.

Every country's greatest hope for the future is its youth. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the young people in both countries to promote peaceful dialogue, empower women, and foster entrepreneurship to further expand the private sectors in their nations.

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, Senator Isakson, no goal will be more important to me than protecting the lives, interests, and welfare of Americans living and traveling in Gabon and Sao Tomé. If confirmed, I look forward to leading and fostering the development of the dynamic embassy team, including the great local staff that we have in Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe.

Thank you.

[Mr. Danies's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOEL DANIES

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and members of the committee: It is an honor to appear before you today. I am grateful to President Trump and to Secretary Tillerson for the confidence that they have placed in me as their nominee to be Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and also the Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe. If confirmed, I will be honored to work with you and other Members of Congress to protect and advance U.S. interests in both countries.

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promote U.S. values and business interests, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of U.S. companies for a level playing field in Gabon.

Gabon is a country located on the strategic Gulf of Guinea. If confirmed, I will work closely with the government as well as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) headquartered in Libreville, to promote regional security cooperation in this vital region by leveraging partnerships with U.S. forces. Gabon is an important partner in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a multilateral public/private initiative for addressing regional concerns, including deforestation and wildlife trafficking. If confirmed, I will continue to advance our shared work on sustained natural resource stewardship that denies revenues to transnational criminal organizations.

The other country to which I am nominated to serve as Ambassador, the small island state of Sao Tomé and Príncipe (STP), has a vibrant political scene but faces severe budgetary constraints that have hampered the dividends of democracy.

U.S. national interests are served by Sao Tomé's strategic location in the Gulf of Guinea and its respect for democracy. Sao Tomé has been a reliable partner, hosting since 1992 a Voice of America relay station that covers much of Africa. It has also encouraged U.S. investment and, as a result, a U.S. company began oil exploration there in 2016.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with Sao Tomé to improve its port security through cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as to strengthen regional security and improve bilateral trade links with the United States.

Every country's greatest hope for the future is its youth. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the young people in both countries to promote peaceful dialogue, empower women, and foster entrepreneurship to further expand the private sectors in their nations.

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and other members of the committee, no goal will be more important to me than protecting the lives, interests and welfare of Americans living and traveling in Gabon and Sao Tomé. If confirmed, I look forward to leading and fostering the development of the dynamic embassy team, including the great local staff that we have in Gabon by serving as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and the Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe. Thank you.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you for your willingness to serve, both of you.

Mr. Vrooman, with regard to Rwanda, what do you consider the greatest challenge you will face there? Does it involve their economy and U.S. participation or promotion of U.S. business there? Is it governance? What do you think the biggest challenge is?

Mr. VROOMAN. The biggest challenge that we will face or I will face, if confirmed as the Ambassador to Rwanda, is to promote the multiple pillars of our policy, and those include, as you have noted, promoting U.S. business, as well as our values, rule of law, and economic growth in Rwanda.

And I think for Rwanda, the biggest challenge is the youth bulge that they face. Like many countries in Africa, they have high fertility rates. Their population of 12 million will double by the year 2035, and they are already the most densely populated country on the continent. So the efforts that U.S. foreign assistance can assist the Rwandans in helping provide jobs for the youth who are unemployed will be critical for their security into the future and to create markets for U.S. exports and trade.

Right now, we have a trade surplus. So that is less of a challenge, but cementing and making sure that our investments in Rwanda are protected—we have made significant investments in energy, aviation, and water treatment, but securing the fact that the American private sector interests will remain engaged will be a continuing challenge.

And finally, on the values side, I think clearly from your comments and from my own, promoting some of the values that we up-

hold, rule of law, will require our technical assistance and some of our programmatic assistance to assist the Rwandans in making good on some of their own constitutional ideals and some of their own values.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Mr. Danies, you mentioned our efforts to help with deforestation and wildlife preservation. They have some of the last remaining forest elephants I think there and lowland gorillas. We, working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, there, what agencies of the U.S. Government are making an effort there?

Mr. DANIES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You are correct that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as USAID, are very involved with the Government of Gabon towards the protection of its wildlife and towards the protection of its environment. This is something that we in the United States care very much for, and this is something that I believe our embassy is very well placed to be able to provide the technical assistance and know-how that we have gathered in the United States to help the Government of Gabon, the people of Gabon protect this environment.

Senator FLAKE. With regard to the Gulf of Guinea, there was concern a while ago, as we had some success with regard to piracy on the other coast of Africa around Somalia, that it might move to the Gulf of Guinea. Are there efforts and cooperation that is taking place to make sure that piracy does not gain a foothold there?

Mr. DANIES. Mr. Chairman, there is very much this sort of cooperation between the United States military forces who do multiple port calls, the U.S. Coast Guard in developing the capacity of the Gabonese maritime forces to be able to both protect the country, protect the region against piracy, against illegal fishing, against malevolent behavior that might take place in the Gulf of Guinea. So we are working very closely, and I can assure you, if confirmed, our embassy will be very engaged in that effort with the Government of Gabon.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. I am going to defer to the esteemed Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. I did not know he was here. [Laughter.]

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Cory.

Thank you, both of you, for accepting the challenge of representing our country as Ambassador. You are both very fortunate to go the countries you are going to.

Rwanda is one of my favorite places in the whole world. Everybody says you really have not been to Rwanda. Have you? I said I have been to Rwanda. And President Kagame is quite a character in and of himself and has done some exemplary things to bring about peace and justice in a time of terrible trouble. And I urge you when you get there—do you know what Umuganda Sunday is? Have you heard about Umuganda Sunday?

I love to tell this story, Mr. Chairman and Senator Booker, because it is just such a telling story about reconciliation in Africa. When Kagame rose to leadership, one of the main things he knew he had to do was bring the people together. So they created this

Umuganda Sunday where one Sunday out of every month, the president of the country declares a holiday. Nobody gets in their cars. Nobody goes anywhere, but the villages all get together and decide on a project they can do together to make their village better.

Senator Corker and I in 2010 were there on Umuganda Sunday and helped dig a stump out of the middle of the road that went through the town and the village going down to the larger town and village. The hardest day's work I ever put in in my life, but the most fun I ever had to see people who were, in many cases, still angry at each other over a lot of the problems that had happened previously, working together to solve a problem for the neighborhood.

And so I commend you, when you get there—you are dealing with a country that has really bent on reconciliation and improvement. It is growing tremendously. It is expanding tremendously. It is a great country, and Kagame has had a few stumps along the way, but he has done a fantastic job as president of that country and does a great job and a great friend of the United States of America.

I have not been to Gabon, but I have helped them get some poultry. They are working very hard to expand their business and economic opportunity working with the University of Georgia on some techniques where they can make a cottage industry in Gabon by raising chickens by families raising them. They are anxious to expand their economic growth.

Both those countries are tremendously important to the United States of America.

And I want to close with this statement and then ask anything you want to say.

Each of those countries, like every country in Africa, has a vote in the United Nations. Africa is the continent of the 21st century for our country. The opportunity to expand American influence and friendship on the continent of Africa offers tremendous opportunity for our country, not only on votes in the UN, friends voting with friends, but also expanding opportunities in markets in those two countries for American value-added products at the beginning of the chain, like baby diapers and things of that nature, to expansion like the industry of poultry and things of that nature.

So you are going to two great opportunities for our country. I know from reading both your resumes, you will both do a great job. And I look forward to hearing a good report when you come back. And I will first volunteer to say if you ever feel like the State Department is overlooking you—and I see the lady behind you is watching me when I say this—call me. I will go down there and vouch for you any time because you are going to the front line of where America's 21st century needs to be, and that is the continent of Africa.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Senator Isakson.

Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much.

Again, it is great that you are here. Your wife now has returned from parking. So if you would like to point her out. Yes. You missed your moment. [Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. I am really grateful again for the two of you.

I want to jump right in. Obviously, these are such critical countries that you all are going to be representing the United States to, and there have been tremendous positive things happening. But I just want to hone in a little bit on some human rights issues and perhaps temper some of the praise for President Kagame as well.

Right now—this is according to the Congressional Research Service—human rights advocates are asserting the laws and taboos prohibiting public acknowledgement of ethnic identity have been wielded as a tool to silence criticism of the government and that years of intimidation and interference have weakened the capacity of civil society to operate effectively. Over the years, various political opponents, critics, and journalists have been criminally prosecuted or have fled the country. Several dissidents have been violently attacked or killed outside the country in what critics portray as state-backed assassination.

There are a lot of these reports. Does this concern you? And tell me what we could be doing from the State Department to address some of these issues.

Mr. VROOMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Booker, for that question. It is an important one and a challenging one, given where they have come from, as Senator Isakson had mentioned, from the genocide onward, and building a community of reconciliation and overcoming the legacy of the genocide is an amazing challenge for an emerging democracy like Rwanda.

I think that some of the key tools that we have to work with the Rwandans have been in the area of rule of law, which is fundamental to addressing any number of the challenges that you have just raised, whether it is with regard to civil society organizations and their freedom of operation, freedom of expression for the media, or for those very same opposition members, some of whom have been detained.

So we have a number of ways in which we are working through USAID programs, one of which is through the University of Northern Ohio which has done training for judges and prosecutors and has worked on law school curriculum that help improve the delivery of justice in Rwanda.

We have also as well an Access to Justice program that is unique with USAID and involving local partnerships and providing legal defense for people in Rwanda. That is critical.

The University of Massachusetts is working with the Legal Aid Forum in Rwanda and looking at the quality and consistency of judicial decisions. And I found that in my experience before in Ethiopia that working on rule of law is one tool to helping a country move towards greater democratic pluralism and the rule of law in the country.

So these programs are really critical, and I thank the Congress and the American people for supporting the efforts that we have put in, as well as the universities that have contributed to those efforts thus far.

Senator BOOKER. So I appreciate that. And I will note that there were many universities you mentioned, none of which were in New Jersey.

But I do have some concerns about the overall State Department's support of the kind of efforts that you are talking about. Last week, Secretary Tillerson held a town hall with employees of the State Department and USAID, which were both mentioned as important actors in the region, which they absolutely are, but when the Secretary announced the State Department's and USAID's missions, neither included democracy or democracy promotion.

I have concerns about the health of civil society in Rwanda and in Gabon, which maybe you both can address, but maybe let us just sticking with Rwanda for a second—I think I respected George Washington as much as I did when I started studying African countries. It seems that President Kagame is intending to stay for an undetermined period of time. The constitution has been changed. Obviously, Rwanda has a tremendous record for promoting women, something frankly that maybe the United States can learn a thing or two from. But when Diane Rwigara, a Kagame critic and would-be first female independent presidential candidate, was denied registration as a candidate, that obviously raises concerns. She was also subject to an apparent smear campaign and was arrested for tax evasion shortly after the vote. I am really concerned about the continued focus on these issues in terms of democracy promotion and what this might mean for long-term stability in a nation that, as you said, is such an essential partner for us in regional stability.

Mr. VROOMAN. Indeed. And I think President Kagame—he was first elected in 2003. He has indicated on several occasions that he does not intend to remain president forever.

Senator BOOKER. But I read the constitution. He could stay till 2035.

Mr. VROOMAN. Indeed. But, again, that is the outward limit of what is conceivably possible under the new constitutional amendments.

But one of the opportunities that I see in the coming year, if confirmed, would be to work with the Rwandan parliament which, as you say, 60 percent are women in the parliament, but primarily those do not include many opposition parties. So it is not a very vibrant body in terms of diversity in terms of political parties.

That said, they are revising their electoral law. And I think it is a hope of many Rwandans, both inside and outside Rwanda, that that electoral law will have in its reform better and more transparent criteria for becoming candidates, which is one of the criticisms that has been levied about the Rwandan democracy, and secondly, that there will be more safeguards put in place for the ballot counting mechanisms that are in place. So I would see it as a fundamental role as an ambassador to engage with Rwandan officials, whether they are in the legislative branch or the executive branch, to work with them at making improvements to their electoral law. And that is an area, as you know, where we have many U.S. agencies, both in and outside of government, that have expertise in that matter and there are many as well around the world.

Senator BOOKER. And, then Mr. Danies—I know I am a little bit over my time, but if you will indulge me with answering the question about human rights concerns. Obviously, there have been election irregularities as well. Can you tell me about it, should you be confirmed, about some of your focus on civil society, democracy, and human rights?

Mr. DANIES. Thank you, Senator.

I would say that that is probably the one area where the United States carries the greatest amount of strength and credibility in the way we have worked with organizations and groups, whether they are in the opposition or whether they are nongovernmental organizations or civil society organizations in countries to reinforce the benefits that they bring to a democratic process.

I would say to you that, if confirmed, I could not imagine behaving any differently in Gabon in the sense of we have a country that has stated its determination to the democratic process, to openness, to transparency. I believe that we should hold them to their word and we should continue to encourage them to proceed down that path and to continue to strengthen those institutions.

Senator BOOKER. [Foreign language spoken.]

Senator FLAKE. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for being here today, for your service, and for your willingness to be nominated for these new very important posts. And I am delighted, Mr. Vrooman, that your brother Bruce is watching from New Hampshire. [Laughter.]

Senator SHAHEEN. I want to ask you because we have all watched, especially given what happened in Rwanda in the 1990s, the genocide, and the gains that have been made there. The importance of women is one of the things that I have watched very closely. I think Rwanda has the highest percentage of women of any country in its national governing body, its parliament. But to what extent has that equality for women in elective office translated across the culture in the country, and to what extent do they, in reality, share power in the country?

Mr. VROOMAN. Thank you, Senator.

I think there is still work to be done in the economic sphere, in the social sphere within Rwanda. As with many women around the world, gender-based violence is still an issue, as it has been in many of the places where I have served, whether in Ethiopia or India. And several of the ways that a U.S. Ambassador and their country team can work to bring attention to those issues and those inequalities is through nominating international women of courage that come to the State Department as nominees from our missions. And we have nominated—I have nominated women in those positions from India and Ethiopia. And I would think that there are people in Rwanda that would deserve similar recognition.

One of the things concretely that we are doing through our programmatic assistance through PEPFAR, for example, recognizing that, for example, female sex workers have the highest prevalence of HIV—Ambassador Birx and the PEPFAR program have given us an opportunity to work on the DREAMS Program to help address both sexual violence and also the spread of HIV among adolescent girls. So the DREAMS Program has given us some additional re-

sources to begin to target that community with additional assistance to help alleviate that challenge.

But one of the things I believe in and I have believed in throughout my career is the importance of the girl child. I have one. So promoting those opportunities—and I think as an ambassador, one of the things we can do is to promote inclusiveness within our country teams to give opportunities to women, to the disabled, and to disabled women. That is one thing we have done in Ethiopia and which I would hope in a country like Rwanda that has suffered after the genocide with many people who face disabilities to give them opportunities, in addition to focusing on women as one of the key communities that does the work in the society and that will open opportunities for Rwanda as it goes forward and continues its economic development.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. It is also one of the reasons why diversity within our State Department is very important as well.

I want to ask both of you about 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, which listed both Rwanda and Gabon on its tier 2 watch list, meaning that they both have work to do in that area. And I wonder if both of you could tell me to what extent you think the leaders in the countries appreciate the importance of addressing this issue and what they might be doing to help make progress.

Mr. VROOMAN. Yes, indeed. And tier 2 watch lists is really a wakeup call. If the tier 2 was not, then the watch list is because that can lead to an automatic downgrade if action is not taken.

I will say that in my briefings and consultations, I have learned about the action plan that was put in place in 2014 to begin to address more seriously the trafficking issues that Rwanda faces. And they have made some headway. All border forces in Rwanda have received training. There are 30,000 community workers who have received training to help identify minors and others who might be victims of trafficking.

We, through the J/TIP Office at the State Department, have offered programs to help provide some regional legal assistance—and this is done throughout the region—in helping them define a stand-alone anti-TIP law that is about to be unveiled. Now, law in itself is not sufficient because implementation and bringing to justice people who are judged guilty of promoting trafficking in persons needs to be done. So I believe our terrific embassy is going to be looking at and evaluating and reporting to what degree there is implementation and execution of that law and bringing people to justice.

The other key aspects are we are working kind of uniquely with the International Organization of Migration both through J/TIP and USAID to form complementary programs to not just look at the law but the implementing regulations so that trafficking prevention, the three P's of anti-trafficking efforts, are really brought to bear and scaled throughout the country. And that is one thing that Rwanda is particularly good at is bringing programs to scale. So, if confirmed, when I go out there, I will be looking to see to what degree that the one-stop shops for people who are seeking protection get it, to see what their needs are because offering protection to victims of trafficking is expensive and challenging, but incredibly important for their rehabilitation. So that is something

that I would look forward to see expanding under the next action plan after this one concludes at the end of the year.

Senator SHAHEEN. Great.

Mr. Chairman, can I get an answer from Mr. Danies as well?

Senator FLAKE. Sure.

Mr. DANIES. Senator, Gabon is very fortunate as being a middle income country which, therefore, means that it is attractive to a lot of the citizens and countries in its neighboring countries. As a result, it is very important for Gabon to have better control over the movement of people in and out of the country in order to be able to combat the illegal trafficking of people. It has a viable economy, which makes it attractive and therefore, of course, allows for criminal elements to use that as a way to be able to continue this horrid practice of trafficking in human beings.

I believe that the United States again is very well placed to provide the sort of assistance that a country like Gabon could use in terms of helping develop its law enforcement capabilities, in helping it increase and provide the right sort of shelters, be able to identify criminal elements, and then create the institutions necessary to both investigate and then prosecute them as a way to stop this sort of practice.

Senator SHAHEEN. I am over my time, but do I understand you to say then—yes or no—are they committed to addressing this issue?

Mr. DANIES. I apologize. Yes, they are very committed to it. This is one of the areas that we have worked very closely with the Government of Gabon.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations to each of you for your careers and for your nominations.

I would actually like to ask both of you—this is almost more an Armed Services question than Foreign Relations. I sit on both, as does Senator Shaheen.

The extent of U.S. military operations in Africa are something that I think a lot of Americans are surprised by when they wake up and they read about the death of American troops in combat in Niger, for example. That was surprising to many, not to those of us who serve on these committees. My son was deployed in Africa with the Marines in 2015, attached to AFRICOM.

But talk a little bit about the state of the mil-to-mil relationship between the United States and each of the countries for which you have been nominated and what you could do in the position as Ambassador to promote cooperation, human rights training, upgrading of military standards, et cetera.

Mr. VROOMAN. Thank you very much, Senator.

It is very important. I have worked in Ethiopia now and, if confirmed, in Rwanda, which are two of the leading African peacekeeping contributors. Both countries and Rwanda are beneficiaries of U.S. training for peacekeeping and have received substantial training monies from the U.S. Congress for support for the ACOTA training of peacekeepers. And in Rwanda's case, they have received

IPPOS police keeping training from INL to support the police in their deployments of foreign police units overseas.

What that means is that cumulatively that 20 percent of Rwanda's forces are deployed—their soldiers are deployed on peacekeeping missions. And all of those have gone or almost all of them have gone through some form of peacekeeping training, which includes respect for rule of law. And that is one reason I think that there has been—Rwandans have been valued in peacekeeping and been awarded, recognized in the Central African Republic for their work. They also have a zero tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse, which is significant and I know is a consistent concern of the Congress and the administration in that regard. So those training programs have been important.

Rwanda like Ethiopia is also a beneficiary of APREP. That is an acronym, so I will spell it that out. But it is the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response country, of which there are six in Africa. And that program has allowed them or will allow them, as it rolls out, to support their logistics, the deployment of medical evacuation units, and their support for aviation, which would facilitate, if we are able to deliver two Cessna aircraft—allow them to do evacuation of peacekeeping personnel in their deployments. So the APREP has given them a significant boost to the security assistance that we offer, and their IMET training is something that they willingly engage in and they permit Leahy vetting very transparently. And that is something that I would, if confirmed, pledge to continue.

Senator Kaine. Thank you.

Mr. Danies, if you could answer the same question about Gabon.

Mr. DANIES. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

Both of us would tell you that the worse news an ambassador can ever receive is the death of an American citizen in their region, much less that of an American citizen who is the military, which means that it is critical to us that we continue to have these military-to-military cooperation arrangements but that we do so in a way that works to strengthen and bolster local forces in order to both be able to protect their citizens but also protect our citizens.

In the case of Gabon, there is a very close partnership certainly related to maritime protection in the Gulf of Guinea, but also in helping to combat the encroachment of poachers into their region which can not only, of course, destroy the environment but also bring with them criminal elements which are dangerous to the country and eventually perhaps to the rest of the world. We are fortunate that the Government of Gabon—Libreville hosts the Economic Community of Central African States, which continues to be a cooperative arrangement of 10 countries in the region with which our U.S. military cooperates, both our naval forces and our military forces. So I believe that the relationship is a strong one and we will continue to keep it that way.

Senator Kaine. I appreciate that.

And, Mr. Chair, my observation from working on the defense authorizing bill every year is that the work we do to train foreign militaries is just like part of a fingernail of the Department of Defense budget, whether it is bringing officers for training here at the War College or in other venues in the United States, or whether

it is on-the-ground training in those countries. But we would want them to want us to be their security partner of choice, and that training both in technical capacity but also around issues like respect for rule of law and human rights is incredibly valuable, and it also builds relationships that are important. The captain you train today could be the defense minister in 10 years or the leader of a country in 20 years.

So this is a really important part of what we do on the defense side and it is about diplomacy and building relationships. These Ambassadors will have an important role to play in it, and I wish you both well. Thank you.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

We have got votes in just a few minutes, but I just have one quick question. Then I think Senator Booker has another.

Mr. VROOMAN, there is a long history of border incidents between Rwanda and Burundi. There have been issues of troops coming across. In what ways are we dealing with that issue, and is the government sufficiently cooperating with us and with the Government of Burundi as well?

Mr. VROOMAN. Yes, sir. In my consultations, I have looked at that history. In the past, the Child Soldier Protection Act—because of Rwanda's support for the M-23 militia in eastern Congo, they were listed under that in 2015 and similarly for recruiting Burundi soldiers in their refugee camps in 2015, later in 2016.

But in the actual year of 2016 and 2017, following that listing, they are no longer, to the extent that I am aware, supporting proxies in those neighboring states. And that is a good thing. So I cannot attribute it to whether the listing had that effect, but the corrective actions that have been taken have been noted by our embassies in the region.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. I am just going to briefly put out two questions and maybe you guys can answer them and we can conclude.

The first one will be for Mr. Danies. Obviously, climate change is having a disproportionate impact on countries like Sao Tomé and Príncipe. What do you believe we could be doing in the United States to help them deal with this pressing concern?

And then the second one for Mr. Vrooman. I have some concerns about the violence between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi and how that might destabilize Rwanda.

If you all could comment on those two, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. DANIES. Thank you, Senator.

Very briefly, just like in the Amazon, one of the biggest sources of mitigation for the climate are protecting forests and rainforests. And both Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe are very fortunate to have viable environments. And therefore, I think it is in our favor to be able to continue to help them protect those, to help them manage them in a very smart way so that they are constantly providing more protection for the environment rather than going through some of the problems countries that have been deforested have seen and which have exacerbated the problem of climate change.

You are right that for a country island state like Sao Tomé and Príncipe, this is especially important, and therefore, I think this is a role that the embassy can play very well in helping them develop the right economic techniques to be able to protect that environment.

Mr. VROOMAN. Senator, to your question about the relations with Burundi, that is obviously a question that the Ambassadors of both missions look to. If confirmed, I will work closely with our embassy in Bujumbura. I am meeting our Ambassador tomorrow as part of my consultations.

But my understanding is that there are more than 70,000 refugees from Burundi in Rwanda currently in camps. So that is an area certainly of concern that I will continue to monitor going forward.

The East African Community is charged with having dialogue and conducting dialogue between the two countries, and that is an area that I would continue to monitor as well, if confirmed as Ambassador to Rwanda.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Senator FLAKE. Well, thank you both. We appreciate you being here and your families as well. I continue to be impressed by the sacrifices that they make. These are tough posts, a long way from home, and we just appreciate your willingness to serve and the sacrifices made by all the families.

For the information of members, the record will remain open until the close of business tomorrow—that is December 20th—including for members to submit questions for the record. We would ask the nominees if you could respond as promptly as possible to these questions.

With the thanks of the committee, the hearing stands adjourned. [Whereupon, at 2:53 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEL DANIES BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question 1. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to promote human rights and democracy? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. From very early in my career, I have worked to promote human rights, beginning with my repeated visits and engagements in Yemen with a small community of Jewish citizens to confirm their security and well-being and to report on behalf of the Embassy any concerns they might have regarding mistreatment or discrimination by the authorities. During this first assignment in Yemen, I also traveled with the Ambassador to visit Eritrean refugees in the southern part of the country to review their living conditions and coordinate with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the protection and care in the refugee camps located there. I was a key member of the staff of the President's Special Representative on Haiti in 1992-93, engaged in the successful effort to overturn the illegal military coup in Haiti and the return of its exiled president. Our primary focus was on the protection of the Haitians fleeing the criminal behavior of the junta leaders. We worked closely with IOM, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCR), and the U.S. military to establish sites in Jamaica, Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas, and Guantanamo for the protection and care of Haitian refugees. I worked diligently within the Department and administration to uphold the Leahy legislation toward Colombia by ensuring that counternarcotics assistance was

provided solely to government entities that were not accused of being or alleged to be human rights violators. I also spent four years in Geneva heading U.S. Government human rights efforts, representing our country's human rights values and objectives before the U.N. Human Rights Council, and coordinating with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). During that period, in a number of instances, I led U.S. Government efforts to hold countries identified as human rights offenders accountable for their behavior, and I successfully negotiated resolutions that promoted and strengthened the values outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Question 2. What are the most pressing human rights issues in Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe? What are the most important steps you expect to take—if confirmed—to promote human rights and democracy in Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions?

Answer. The most important human rights problems for Gabon, as noted in State Department's 2016 Human Rights Report, are harsh prison conditions, lengthy pre-trial detention, and arbitrary arrests. In addition, the 2016 presidential election was marred by significant irregularities. I will pursue opportunities to continue to engage leaders from the Government, opposition parties, and civil society to increase respect for human rights and protection for fundamental freedoms, and to press Gabon to abide more fully by democratic norms and principles.

In Sao Tomé & Príncipe, also as noted in the State Department's 2016 Human Rights report, the most pressing human rights issues are difficult prison conditions, official corruption, and domestic violence. I will work closely with the Sao Toméan Government and civil society to identify effective ways to promote transparency and rule of law.

In both countries, establishing open and honest relationships with government and civil society will be crucial to countering these issues.

Question 3. If confirmed, what are the potential obstacles to addressing the specific human rights issues you have identified in your previous response? What challenges will you face in Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe in advancing human rights, civil society and democracy in general?

Answer. Institutional capacity will likely be the biggest obstacle. In addition, civil society remains weak in both countries. I will seek opportunities and resources for capacity building. I would note that in both countries, severe budgetary constraints will also limit local governments' efforts. Shifting institutional culture as well as societal norms will likely be challenges.

In Sao Tomé and Príncipe, we face the added challenge of promoting human rights from a distance. We do not have a significant presence on the ground and must engage from Libreville. To counter this challenge, I will regularly visit and seek opportunities to partner with Sao Toméan Government institutions and civil society to support democratic development and respect for human rights.

Question 4. Are you committed to meeting with human rights, civil society and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs in Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe? If confirmed, what steps will you take to pro-actively support the Leahy Law and similar efforts, and ensure that provisions of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation activities reinforce human rights?

Answer. I am committed to meeting with organizations that are concerned with human rights and civil society issues concerning Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe. Ensuring that the United States does not provide military assistance to foreign military units that violate human rights is crucially important. I will ensure that Embassy personnel responsible for vetting under the provisions of the Leahy Law are familiar with its rules and can implement them fully and effectively. I will engage host government interlocutors to remind them of the importance the United States places on respect of human rights by security services.

Question 5. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe to address cases of key political prisoners or persons otherwise unjustly targeted by Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe?

Answer. I will engage with the governments of both countries to address cases of political prisoners and arbitrary arrests.

Question 6. Will you engage with Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe on matters of human rights, civil rights and governance as part of your bilateral mission?

Answer. I will engage regularly on these issues with the Governments of Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe, opposition parties, and NGOs.

Question 7. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question 8. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign Government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question 9. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Gabon and Sao Tomé & Príncipe?

Answer. Neither I nor any of my immediate family members have any financial interests in Gabon or in Sao Tomé and Príncipe.

Question 10. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service?

Answer. The country team is a very important part of any embassy; it provides direction, feedback, and guidance to the Chief of Mission on all aspects of embassy operations. Seventy percent of Embassy Libreville's country team is comprised of officers from a diverse background and/or underrepresented group. These talented and highly-qualified officers work in nearly 50 percent of our positions.

I will support and mentor all officers at post to ensure they have an equal opportunity to advance through the organization to the highest levels throughout their career. Additionally, I will make a concerted personal effort to reach out and recruit qualified officers who reflect the rich diversity of our nation to fill the periodic vacancies at the embassy.

Question 11. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy is fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. I will ensure that embassy personnel are familiar with applicable federal laws and State Department policies that protect an inclusive workspace. This includes the continued appointment and support of EEO officers at post, as well as periodic Embassy-wide town halls to discuss issues of diversity, inclusiveness, and bullying for both the American and the locally-employed staff. Additionally, I will ensure officers at all levels are given the opportunity to serve and chair the many important committees within an embassy that shape both internal and external operations, to include the various budget, security, safety, and employment committees. I will also motivate my staff to continue to pursue leadership training opportunities that reinforce the values of diversity and inclusiveness.

Question 12. In what sectors is most official corruption found in these countries?

Answer. Corruption remains a major concern in Gabon. Nepotism, in particular, places a burden on the country's financial situation, resulting in a large and expensive civil service. There are also widespread reports of Gabonese officials' utilizing public funds for travel on private jets or openly displaying extravagant spending such as for high-end luxury vehicles. Within key economic sectors, the timber and petroleum industries are most affected by corrupt behaviors, although such corruption is often difficult to prove. Most Sudanese also view the judicial system as highly corrupt. Corruption also manifests itself in the actions of lower level functionaries, including police officers, the customs administration, and public utilities.

The Gabonese Government launched an anti-corruption campaign called "Operation Mamba" in 2016. To date, only a small number of officials or former officials have been prosecuted through this effort. Former Hydrocarbons Minister Etienne Dieudonné Ngoubou is incarcerated. Former Minister (Economy, Budget, and Infrastructure) and Advisor to the President Magloire Ngambia is facing charges of embezzling state funds in the amount of \$810 million. While the Operation Mamba cases reflect positive steps, more needs to be done in order for Gabonese authorities to address the nation's corruption challenges.

Official corruption is much less open in Sao Tomé and Príncipe, but it is still cause for concern among embassy interlocutors. In particular, there are those who vociferously complain in local media that nepotism influences the hiring process for government positions as well as the awarding of contracts. Although in the past

there have generally been weak government accountability and controls, the National Assembly recently passed legislation authorizing the referral of public corruption cases to the Public Prosecutor's Office for investigation. On December 20, the National Assembly directed one of its own, Deputy Delfim Neves, to present himself to the Public Prosecutor's Office to for questioning regarding an attempt to bribe magistrates.

Question 13. If confirmed, what tools do you have at your disposal to help address corruption and what actions will you take as Ambassador to advocate for improvement in transparency and good governance with relevant stakeholders?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the two primary anti-corruption groups in Gabon: the Commission to Combat Illicit Enrichment (CNLCEI) and the National Financial Investigations Agency (ANIF). I would also work with civil society and members of the non-governmental organization (NGO) community to continue to raise the public's awareness about the importance of eliminating corruption at all levels and reinforce the important role of civil society in pushing for greater transparency and accountability. I would also continue to explore opportunities to encourage Gabonese institutions to take advantage of U.S. Government technical assistance programs to assist with anti-corruption efforts, transparency, and the rule of law. These include exchange programs focusing on anti-corruption efforts and organizing remote discussions through Digital Video Conference technology and expert speaker programs that target anti-corruption.

While the amount and scope of public corruption in Sao Tomé and Príncipe (STP) is relatively small, our active engagement with the Government, opposition parties, and NGOs is important to promote greater transparency. If confirmed, I intend to visit STP regularly and deliver consistent messaging in support of rule of law and the principle of meritocracy.

Question 14. The State Department has ranked Gabon "Tier 2 Watchlist" in its most recent Trafficking in Persons Report. If confirmed, what types of U.S. diplomatic efforts and assistance, if any, would you pursue to help Gabon better tackle this problem?

Answer. The State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Libreville actively engage with the full range of public and private stakeholders to encourage the Gabonese Government to take additional steps to address trafficking in persons (TIP). Gabon ratified the Palermo protocols in 2010, but has yet to harmonize its domestic legal system. In addition, our joint efforts are required to strengthen key institutions and address the broad perception that bribery of the judiciary effectively eliminates trafficking-related cases. There have been no trafficking-related prosecutions in recent years. If confirmed, I would work with effective individuals and institutions in Gabon to reconcile its penal code with the Palermo protocols, and I would seek opportunities to provide direct support through USG technical assistance, including training for the judiciary.

Question 15. In what ways might such efforts be incorporated into existing U.S. programs that aim to help strengthen Gabon's security sector and the rule of law?

Answer. The U.S. Embassy has had some success in recent years building capacity in individual judges through the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). If confirmed, I would work to continue to offer this type of experience to members of the judiciary we identify as emerging leaders. As the pool of IVLP alumni in the judiciary grows, we are hopeful they will form a nucleus around which rule of law will grow and ultimately be the norm.

Question 16. In your view, what are the core U.S. interests in Gabon? What changes to U.S. bilateral aid would you advocate, if any?

Answer. The core U.S. interests in Gabon are long-term political stability, sustaining maritime and border security, supporting U.S. companies, including those that are heavily invested in the petroleum industry, eliminating wildlife and other illicit trafficking, protecting the flora and fauna in the Congo Basin, and supporting Gabonese peacekeeping efforts. Gabon is also a Cooperative Security Location for the Department of Defense, which allows the country to facilitate U.S. crisis response, including emergency evacuation of U.S. embassies. At present, U.S. bilateral aid for Gabon is limited to International Military Education and Training (IMET) programming, grants and direct support awarded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). Gabon has also received security assistance funding through the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) account to fund a number of key efforts, including peacekeeping capacity building, counter-poaching efforts, maritime security capacity building, and military education institution building. Gabon has also received funding through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) fund maritime capacity building

efforts. In addition to supporting these existing efforts, I would advocate in two key areas:

Agribusiness: Gabon is very interested in attracting businesses that transform natural resources, generating added value. If confirmed, I would like to look at ways that agencies such as OPIC, USTDA, the U.S. Export-Import Bank, and USAID might be able to support U.S. companies that are interested in investing in Gabon. There is a relatively short window of opportunity to help Gabon develop the structures necessary to take advantage of the remaining eight years of AGOA.

Rural Development: With Embassy Libreville's support and advocacy, both the Government of Gabon and the Peace Corps have expressed interest in re-establishing a Peace Corps program in Gabon, resources permitting. If confirmed, I would continue to advocate for the return of Peace Corps as I believe there is potential to have a positive impact in all six of Peace Corps' project sectors: agriculture, community economic development, education, the environment, health, and youth in development. If confirmed, I would like to see whether Peace Corps could return to Gabon.

Question 17. Please describe U.S. maritime security cooperation efforts in Gabon. Please describe U.S. support for Gabonese environmental conservation, and the results of such efforts to date.

Answer. Maritime Security cooperation is a key element of U.S. engagement in Gabon. Gabon is a part of AFRICOM's Line of Effort (LOE) Four, which supports and focuses U.S.-based security assistance toward maritime security and countering illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea. Gabon has historically received all its maritime security cooperation through the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard.

In 2014, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy delivered recommendations for a maritime security strategy to President Ali Bongo. Shortly thereafter, Gabon established a Sea Security Council, which currently advises its president on maritime capacity building. The U.S. Embassy works with the Gabonese to identify areas where the United States can support the implementation of Gabon's maritime security strategy.

One of the U.S. Navy programs supporting this strategy is the expansion and maintenance of its shore-based sensor surveillance system, the Regional Maritime Awareness Capability. The current project, funded through State Department assistance, aims to build a sensor site at Cap Esterias (north of Libreville), repair and upgrade existing systems in Port Gentil, and potentially install a new sensor site in Mayumba (southern border between Gabon and the Republic of Congo) with existing Africa Maritime Security (AMS) Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants. AMS has also supported the sustainment of naval vessels.

For early 2018, the U.S. Navy is also working with Gabon to host OBANGAME EXPRESS 2018, a Gulf of Guinea naval exercise. This will consist of Gabon's hosting a Final Planning Event in mid-January 2018, followed by the exercise the last two weeks of March 2018. The U.S. Navy is also working with Gabon to host a Senior Leader Seminar during the exercise, which will draw Chiefs of the Navies from many Gulf of Guinea states, as well as international partners and senior U.S. Navy leadership to a three-day maritime security seminar.

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program consistently prioritizes developing the capacity of Gabonese naval officers. In FY 2017, Gabon sent two naval officers to further their military training at U.S. Navy and Coast Guard training centers. The Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)-funded Africa Maritime Security Initiative (AMSI) has supported the training of officers in Gabon on maritime topics including maintenance, management, and boarding team operations. Three commissioned Gabonese naval officers recently graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. The U.S. Embassy is working with these commissioned officers to ensure a positive impact on the Gabonese Navy and hopes to continue to provide technical to support qualified Gabonese candidates.

Environmental Conservation

In 2018, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will support the fifth year of a five-year cooperative agreement developed in collaboration with Gabon's National Parks Agency (ANPN). Through this agreement, USFWS partners with ANPN to address rapidly escalating threats to security, including elephant poaching and trans-boundary environmental crime. In addition, USFWS has stationed a Special Agent/Attaché at the Embassy in Libreville to partner with Gabonese authorities in the investigation of natural resource crimes. USFWS draws from its expertise in wildlife management to assist Gabon as it develops a protected area system and capable personnel to run it. USFWS also plans to continue support for small grants to non-governmental organizations to complement ANPN's activities.

With USFWS support, ANPN has successfully eliminated elephant poaching from the Wonga Wongué Presidential Reserve, whose bull elephants were previously heavily poached for their ivory. This approach is being replicated in other national parks in Gabon. USFWS support has also led to the establishment of a new Marine Protected Area (MPA) network via the 'Blue Gabon' initiative. In working towards an expanded MPA network, ANPN, in collaboration with the Gabonese Navy and Gabon's national fisheries agency, succeeded in bringing together diverse stakeholders ranging from coastal communities to companies involved in offshore oil production. The U.S. Government will also assist the Gabonese Armed Forces and ANPN Park Rangers to develop their civil-military operations capability to ameliorate a gap in the Government's ability to work with the local populace on anti-poaching efforts.

Question 18. Did Sao Tomé's MCC Threshold Program achieve its stated aims?

Answer. Sao Tomé's MCC Threshold Program was very successful. It helped the Government of Sao Tomé increase revenue through improved tax and customs administration and enforcement, and also helped streamline business registration procedures. Based solely on the success of its Threshold Program, Sao Tomé would usually be considered for a compact, but it is considered too small. If confirmed, I would like to explore opportunities for including STP in MCC regional programs or MCC programs that are designed to target small island nations, such as those in the Pacific.

Question 19. What kinds of U.S. assistance, if any, would you advocate for Sao Tomé?

Answer. If confirmed, I would advocate for assistance in agriculture and agribusiness development, environmental degradation, and rural development. It is worthwhile to note that Peace Corps suspended its program in Sao Tomé and Príncipe when it suspended its Gabon program in 2005, as the two programs were managed out of Libreville. If Peace Corps were to resume operating in Gabon, I would advocate for a corresponding return to Sao Tomé.

Question 20. What are the aims and status of U.S. maritime security capacity-building efforts in Sao Tomé, and the role of the IMET program?

Answer. Nearly all capacity-building occurs in the maritime security sector, where the U.S. works closely with the Sao Toméan Coast Guard. The United States led a multilateral effort with STP, Portugal, Brazil, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the development of STP's draft maritime security strategy. The strategy was approved in December 2017 by the Council of Ministers and awaits final approval by the National Assembly, the last remaining step before we can continue our assistance in supporting the development of an implementation plan.

The United States conducts security assistance training and annual military exercises with STP with the intent to help strengthen its maritime security capacity. The STP Coast Guard participates annually in the U.S. Navy-sponsored maritime security exercise OBANGAME EXPRESS, which Gabon will host in March 2018. STP has historically participated in limited fashion since 2011 by contributing some vessels, boarding teams, and use of its maritime operations center. Moreover, the U.S. Navy evaluates the STP Coast Guard's performance and programs training, when available, to assist in improving identified deficiencies.

In 2007, the United States installed the first shore-based sensor system, the Regional Maritime Awareness Capability, on Sao Tomé and Príncipe for maritime surveillance in the Gulf of Guinea. In 2010, the United States granted a 43-foot Archangel class patrol craft, using anti-terrorism funding. Both the sensor systems and vessel have suffered from a lack of maintenance due to insufficient funding within the Ministry of Defense and the Coast Guard, leaving both in a state of disrepair. Small Africa Maritime Security (AMS) Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants have permitted some minimal maintenance. The U.S. Navy expects to spend \$150,000 in repairs to the shore-based sensors systems in February 2018 and, dependent on the availability of funding, conduct around \$200,000 in repairs to Archangel.

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program focuses on professionalizing STP's Coast Guard through professional military education (PME), Expanded-IMET (E-IMET) focused on human rights and rule of law, and limited technical training. Over the past three years, the IMET program has enabled the U.S. Embassy in Libreville to send three Sao Toméan Coast Guard officers to further their professional military education at U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy training centers. Currently, the IMET program sponsors a Sao Toméan Lieutenant Colonel attending the U.S. Navy Command College in Newport, Rhode Island.

In late 2017, the Portuguese Navy announced that it would base the naval patrol craft "Zaire" in Sao Tome. The plan is to have two 33-man crews, one from STP and the other from Portugal, to patrol the waters within STP's Exclusive Economic Zone starting in January 2018. Over the course of one year, Portugal will phase in STP Coast Guard crew members and replace Portuguese sailors. The end state of this operation is STP taking complete control of the mission, comprised of only STP sailors, by January 2019. To support this endeavor, AFRICOM aims to start the process of integrating STP and Portugal into the Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP) with the vessel as possible means to eventually conduct combined operations in the Gulf of Guinea with a U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET).

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO PETER VROOMAN BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question 1. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to promote human rights and democracy? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. During the course of my Foreign Service career, I have drafted or supervised the drafting of numerous Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights, including reports on Djibouti, Lebanon, Israel, and Ethiopia. When I served as the country desk officer for Algeria, I worked with the American Bar Association, which conveyed a "Rule of Law letter" to the Algerian Government on the case of another defense attorney who had been arrested and was later acquitted. I developed a strategy with our Embassy in Algiers and several international election monitoring organizations for observing the 1997 legislative elections, which, while flawed, marked the evolution toward more democratic government after years of violent conflict. At the United Nations, I worked with other diplomats to call for a Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi death camps. This session provided an opportunity for Elie Wiesel to address representatives of Member States, and its most significant impact was the establishment of an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day at the United Nations. In Israel, our team supported local NGO efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants and trafficking victims. As spokesperson of the U.S. Embassy in India, I promoted the rights of the Girl Child and efforts to combat gender-based violence. For example, in the wake of several horrific rape cases in Delhi, our Embassy nominated an Indian victim as an International Woman of Courage. Q

Question 2. What are the most pressing human rights issues in Rwanda? What are the most important steps you expect to take—if confirmed—to promote human rights and democracy in Rwanda? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions?

Answer. The State Department's most recent human rights report notes that the most important human rights issues in Rwanda are government harassment and arrest of political dissidents; restrictions on media freedom and civil liberties; and restrictions on and harassment of nongovernmental organizations. If confirmed, I would continue to consistently engage in a frank dialogue with the Government on human rights issues. I would ensure that Embassy staff attend relevant trials that are open to the public. I would also look for opportunities to sustain our engagement and programming with respect to promoting the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, and freedom of expression.

Question 3. If confirmed, what are the potential obstacles to addressing the specific human rights issues you have identified in your previous response? What challenges will you face in Rwanda in advancing human rights, civil society, and democracy in general?

Answer. Rwanda often replies to criticism of its human rights record that it is a sovereign country with a unique context and that outside actors should not interfere in its internal affairs, particularly after the failure of the international community to intervene to prevent the 1994 genocide. Our challenge is convincing the Government that efforts to silence critics run counter to Rwanda's development goals and constitutionally enshrined rights, and that greater respect for freedom of expression and media freedoms are crucial to fostering the knowledge-based economy the Government seeks to build.

Question 4. Are you committed to meeting with human rights, civil society and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights

NGOs in Rwanda? If confirmed, what steps will you take to pro-actively support the Leahy Law and similar efforts, and ensure that provisions of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation activities reinforce human rights?

Answer. I am committed to meeting with U.S. and local human rights and civil society organizations, if confirmed. If confirmed, I will also ensure that my staff fully complies with the Leahy Law and similar efforts.

Question 5. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Rwanda to address cases of key political prisoners or persons otherwise unjustly targeted by Rwanda?

Answer. Yes, my Embassy team and I will actively engage with Rwanda on such cases.

Question 6. Will you engage with Rwanda on matters of human rights, civil rights, and governance as part of your bilateral mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will actively engage with Rwandan officials on matters of human rights, civil rights, and governance. These issues are indispensable to our bilateral diplomacy and central to our efforts to ensure that Rwanda consolidates the socioeconomic gains it has made in the past decades.

Question 7. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question 8. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question 9. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in the Rwanda?

Answer. Neither I nor any members of my immediate family have any financial interests in Rwanda.

Question 10. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service?

Answer. In 1991, I entered the Foreign Service with two classmates who were the first two blind Foreign Service Officers. Their service inspired me to promote an inclusive workplace. I subsequently served as an EEO Counselor at two large U.S. embassies and this experience has greatly enhanced my toolkit for promoting the respect for and encouragement of diversity in the workplace. For example, I recommended mission-wide training and sensitization regarding sexual harassment in the workplace at three embassies. In one instance, I succeeded in removing a local guard supervisor who had created a hostile work environment for female employees. The removal of this bully not only addressed a valid EEO complaint, but also allowed for the development of a more tolerant and inclusive workforce environment that benefited all employees at the Embassy. My message as a mentor and a leader has been to encourage everyone at our missions to know their EEO rights and their reporting responsibilities regarding harassment and discrimination. If confirmed, I would ensure that all employees take required No FEAR Act training and EEO sensitization aimed at advancing this objective.

Question 11. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. In Addis Ababa, I chaired an interagency Inclusiveness Working Group that included supervisors and managers to look for ways to promote this value internally within our mission and externally in our public diplomacy and programmatic outreach. For example, we looked for concrete ways to promote awareness of the challenges faced by disabled persons. We awarded community grants to local NGOs and took steps to make sure that the Embassy, the Ambassador's residence, and our American space in Addis Ababa are accessible to disabled persons. We created a Disability Advisor position within our human resources section to promote accessibility, accommodation strategies, and more effective recruitment policies

for our own staff. If confirmed, I would look forward to engaging in similar initiatives with our country team in Rwanda and will ensure that all Department of State supervisors have taken required leadership courses regarding EEO/Diversity and the fundamentals of supervision at the Foreign Service Institute, or other accredited leadership training institutions.

Question 12. On December 6, the U.N. Committee Against Torture released its concluding observations after a routine review of the situation in Rwanda. During the review, committee members raised concerns about serious violations—including torture, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders and opposition party members. What role should the U.S. play in addressing the concerns raised by the U.N. with the Rwandan Government?

Answer. The U.S. Government has repeatedly expressed concerns about torture; extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition figures in Rwanda. Our Embassy has also encouraged senior members of the Rwandan Government to engage with U.N. bodies and international human rights organizations to address credible allegations of human rights violations. If confirmed, I will continue to raise these concerns with the Rwandan Government. I will also encourage the Government of Rwanda to continue to investigate allegations of torture and to bring additional perpetrators of torture to justice, as the committee against torture highlighted in its second periodic report (CAT/C/RWA/CO/2) regarding Rwandan Government efforts to date.

Question 13. Rwanda is ranked 50th of 176 on Transparency International's Corruption Index. In what sectors is most official corruption found in Rwanda?

Answer. Rwanda is ranked among the least corrupt countries in Africa, and the government has been proactive in addressing corruption when it occurs. While corruption is not prevalent within any specific economic sectors, there are occasional cases of misuse of public funds. Rwanda's National Public Prosecution Authority routinely prosecutes civil servants, police, and other officials for fraud, petty corruption, awarding of public tenders illegally, embezzlement, and mismanagement of public assets. In 2017, the vice rector of the University of Rwanda and the managing directors of the Water and Sanitation Agency and the Energy Utility Corporation were arrested on corruption charges. Between September 2016 and August 2017, 203 individuals—mostly local leaders and administrative staff members—were convicted of embezzlement.

Question 14. If confirmed, what tools do you have at your disposal to help address corruption and what actions will you take as Ambassador to advocate for improvement in transparency and good governance with relevant Rwandan stakeholders?

Answer. The Government of Rwanda has stated its commitment to eradicate official corruption. Our Embassy is actively engaged in advocating for improvements in fiscal transparency with senior Rwandan officials and in promoting capacity building for local officials and administrative staff to improve good governance and management of public resources. If confirmed, I would continue these efforts.

Question 15. The State Department has ranked Rwanda "Tier 2 Watchlist" on trafficking in persons. If confirmed, what types of U.S. diplomatic efforts and assistance, if any, would you pursue to help Rwanda better tackle this problem?

Answer. The United States is supporting Rwanda's efforts to address the concerns raised in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report through multiple initiatives geared to improving inter-government coordination on TIP and boosting investigative and prosecutorial capacity. For example, in January 2017, USAID awarded a \$1.3 million grant to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist Rwanda in combatting trafficking.

If confirmed, I would monitor the effectiveness of this new program, along with other U.S. Government-funded initiatives to combat trafficking in persons and continue to make the issue a priority in our diplomatic engagement with the Government of Rwanda.

Question 16. In what ways might such efforts [to combat human trafficking] be incorporated into existing U.S. programs that aim to help strengthen Rwanda's security sector and the rule of law?

Answer. In March 2017, the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP) awarded a targeted technical assistance grant to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime for investigative and prosecutorial training.

J/TIP has also approved an additional award for FY 2018 to the International Organization for Migration to combat TIP, including in refugee camps, that complements the existing USAID grant to IOM.

If confirmed, I would look for synergies between these programs and existing police-training programs that the U.S. Government supports, such as the International Law Enforcement Academy and police, peacekeeping, and capacity-building programs. I would also encourage the Government of Rwanda to address recommendations identified in our TIP report.

Question 17. What steps has Rwanda taken, if any, to address alleged official involvement in Burundian refugee recruitment into armed groups in 2015–2016?

Answer. In 2016, the Government of Rwanda adopted new guidelines on refugee camp management, which explicitly outlawed recruitment and trafficking-in-persons in refugee camps and imposed criminal sanctions for these actions. There were no credible reports of Rwandan authorities' involvement in the recruitment of refugees into armed groups from Rwanda's refugee camps in 2017, and Rwanda was removed from the Child Soldier Prevention Act list in 2017.

Question 18. The U.S. has invested heavily in development and peacekeeping in Rwanda over the past two decades. What impacts, if any, might the administration's proposal to decrease funding for health and development programs have on Rwanda, if implemented? What democracy-promotion programs might be feasible, if any?

Answer. U.S. assistance in Rwanda has improved basic health services, expanded economic opportunities in rural areas, strengthened agricultural production and food security, prepared youth to contribute to the transitioning economy, and encouraged citizen-responsive governance. USAID will continue to find effective ways to leverage private sector and local resources to advance these development goals and support Rwanda's efforts to reduce its reliance on foreign assistance. USAID supports a number of targeted activities to promote the rule of law, human rights, civil society, and the media. These activities include strengthening local NGO capacity to engage in policy-making, improving the ability of the media to provide independent and impartial information to objectively inform citizens, and skills training for judges to issue accessible and transparent decisions.

Question 19. What lessons can we draw from Rwanda's response to criticism and military aid restrictions imposed in reaction to Rwanda's support for rebel groups in DRC and Burundi?

Answer. Rwanda defends fiercely its reputation and actions when challenged by international partners and NGOs and is quick to issue defensive responses to any evidence or reports linking the Government to wrongdoing. However, Rwanda also cares about its international reputation, and in some instances has taken corrective steps in the past in response to concerns about its actions in the region when met with sustained criticism and especially punitive measures that affect its access to international aid. Coordinated messaging from the international community, including the United States, has been important in encouraging Rwanda to play a constructive role in supporting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region, including in the DRC.

Question 20. Rwanda is named in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Strategy for Accelerating HIV/AIDS Epidemic Control (2017–2020) as one of 13 high-burdened countries prioritized for investment during the life of the strategy to achieve the 90-90-90 targets by 2020, whereby 90 percent of people living with HIV know their status, 90 percent of people who know their status are accessing treatment and 90 percent of people on treatment are virally suppressed. What are the main challenges facing the country in achieving their 90-90-90 goal?

Answer. Because Rwanda is in the "last mile" to reach the 90-90-90 goals, finding the remaining HIV-positive individuals is the country's greatest challenge. Therefore, the PEPFAR program in Rwanda is focusing on finding undiagnosed HIV-positive individuals in specific key populations (commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, etc.) who have the highest prevalence rates and getting them onto antiretroviral treatment. PEPFAR is also increasing its testing efforts in geographic areas that have the highest HIV prevalence rates (i.e. the three districts of Kigali) and supporting proven interventions to reduce new infections.

Question 21. If confirmed, what will you do to support Rwanda and its communities in achieving that [90-90-90] goal?

Answer. In addition to increasing efforts to find, test, and treat the remaining undiagnosed HIV-positive individuals, it is imperative to continue providing support to direct services in order to maintain the impressive results Rwanda has already achieved in putting and keeping people living with HIV on treatment, which is key for viral suppression. If confirmed, I would concentrate my efforts on ensuring that the Government of Rwanda continues to foster an environment that enables these successes to continue, while strengthening its own domestic health investments. As such, I would work closely with senior government leaders to support the implementation of PEPFAR activities and initiatives to reach the 90-90-90 goal and maintain the U.S. taxpayers' investment in a program that has saved tens of thousands of lives in Rwanda and millions of lives throughout the African continent.
