

Testimony of Sara Aviel
Nominee to be the United States Alternate Executive Director
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
Nomination Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 13, 2012

Chairman Udall, Ranking Member Corker, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

It is an honor to have been nominated by the President to serve as the Alternate Executive Director at the World Bank. I am extremely grateful to Secretary Geithner, Under Secretary Brainard, and the U.S. Executive Director Ian Solomon for their support.

I also want to thank you and your staffs for taking the time to meet with me. If confirmed, I look forward to advancing our shared commitment of making the World Bank a more effective and accountable organization.

I was blessed to grow up with parents who ingrained in me a deep respect for other cultures and traditions. For my mother, as a professor of international relations, this was her life's work. And for me, that meant trips that often included meetings with government and civil society officials and lessons about local history and politics.

At the same time, my parents instilled in me a deep appreciation for my country and the tremendous privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities that come with being an American. For my father it was particularly personal. As a Holocaust survivor, his childhood was one of horrific deprivation and suffering that is hard for me to even imagine. So when he told me that just by being born in this country was like winning the lottery, I believed him.

So to now come before you, with the opportunity to represent this great country at the World Bank – an institution formed in the wake of that dreadful war– is a particular honor for me.

American leaders helped create the World Bank in the recognition that a multilateral institution focused on reconstruction and development would advance our strategic and economic interests and moral values. In a time of high unemployment and tight fiscal constraints at home, the importance of the World Bank may not always be readily apparent.

Yet my experience in the administration – both in my current role as a Director of International Economic Affairs at the National Security Council and the National Economic Council, and previously as a Senior Advisor to Secretary Geithner – has reaffirmed the belief that support of the World Bank is a moral, strategic, and economic imperative for our country and that U.S. leadership at the institution is essential.

The World Bank has played a central role in promoting open economies that become growing export markets for American companies. During the global financial crisis, the World Bank acted quickly, dramatically increasing lending to help protect the poorest from the worst impacts of the crisis and to restore liquidity for world trade flows.

As we grapple with how best to support transitions in places where we have important interests at stake like Afghanistan and the Middle East and North Africa, we find ourselves turning again and again to institutions like the World Bank.

Strong American leadership is essential. I have seen firsthand how often we are the driving force for action, forging consensus in the midst of seemingly intractable international disputes.

Before joining the Administration, my career was focused on international development. From war widows in Afghanistan to AIDS orphans in Zambia, I have worked with the world's most vulnerable people and experienced the successes and challenges of development firsthand.

As President Obama has said, broad-based economic growth is the most powerful force the world has ever known for eradicating poverty and creating opportunity. That understanding led me to make leveraging the private sector a focus of my work. Prior to working at the Treasury Department, I served on the leadership team of a social investment fund that provided financing to small and medium enterprises in developing countries.

One theme that cuts across much of my experience is the need to demonstrate impact and improve effectiveness through rigorous evaluations of projects and sharing of best practices. As a lecturer at Yale University, I brought these experiences into the classroom as I taught my students to look beyond the latest development trends to the enormous complexity of implementation in challenging environments.

If confirmed, I will work diligently to advance U.S. objectives at the World Bank by serving as a careful steward of U.S. taxpayer resources and promoting greater accountability, transparency, and effectiveness.

I have learned invaluable lessons from being a part of international diplomacy and policy at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Those lessons, combined with the hard-earned experiences working in some of the most complex settings, will make me an effective representative and advocate for U.S. interests at the World Bank.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the members of this committee and your staff. I have seen firsthand how congressional involvement can provide leverage to U.S. negotiators and I will seek ways to partner together to advance our shared goals on behalf of the American people.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.