

Statement of Michele J. Sison
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Haiti
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 4, 2017

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Haiti. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Tillerson have placed in me.

For the past three decades, I've been honored to represent our country as a career Foreign Service officer. I've been privileged to lead our Embassies in the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka as U.S. Ambassador, and currently serve as U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to work closely with the Congress to advance America's interests in Haiti.

The U.S. and Haiti share a long history. We are close neighbors and are linked through a sizable Haitian-American diaspora. Over the years, Haiti has suffered periods of violence and political instability that slowed its economic growth.

I first served in Haiti in the early 1980's – my first tour with the State Department. Then, as now, it was clear that Haiti needed to strengthen governmental institutions, good governance, and transparency if it was to prosper and lift its citizens from deep poverty. Today, after two years of political impasse, Haiti has a democratically-elected government in place; the United States and the international community now have a long-term partner with whom we can engage.

The United States has worked in partnership with a Haitian-led process to help the country build a more promising future. Thanks to broad bipartisan support in Congress, U.S. assistance has helped advance economic opportunities for Haitians; develop a comprehensive food security strategy; provide access to basic health care and water and sanitation services; and improve educational opportunities for youth.

This strong engagement helps encourage Haitians to live and work in Haiti, rather than embark on dangerous and illegal migration to the United States, and supports U.S. efforts to secure our borders.

Since 2010, U.S. assistance of \$8 million in investment capital from the Haitian private sector and other sources has been mobilized to assist small-and medium-sized enterprises -- creating jobs for over 13,000 Haitians, about one-third of whom are women. In addition, almost 13,000 jobs have been created in northern Haiti's industrial park. Some 70,000 farmers have increased incomes and the U.S. government has also introduced improved seeds, fertilizer, irrigation, and other new technologies to over 118,000 farmers. And the Haitian National Police is now a stronger, better-trained force. Many health indicators continue to improve, and through the U.S.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United States has provided more than \$100 million to prevent and respond to cholera.

But Haiti's long-term development will require the Government of Haiti to continue to institutionalize rule of law and uphold more transparent, accountable institutions to improve the future of Haitian citizens and address the factors contributing to migration and trafficking in persons. U.S. rule of law assistance in Haiti supports the Haitian National Police in improving its capacity and growing its ranks to better serve and protect the Haitian people. The Haitian National Police has made significant progress with U.S. support, including increasing its community policing, counter-narcotics and anti-kidnapping capabilities. Our assistance is also aimed at strengthening judicial independence, reducing pre-trial detention levels, and supporting legislative reforms.

Recently, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to withdraw the military component of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, a mission that had been deployed since 2004. The UN vote reflected recognition of the progress Haiti had made towards stabilization and return to democratic order. A smaller, police-only UN successor mission will launch on October 16, 2017, and will focus on police development, strengthening the rule of law, and protecting human rights. If confirmed, I will work to ensure strong coordination between Haitian government and UN rule of law efforts and our U.S. programming in this crucial sector.

Finally, while continuing to take into account the challenges in Haiti, we must not lose sight of the factors working in Haiti's favor, including its vibrant civil society and media. Of course, one of the most important of these factors is the continued support of Congressional committees and staff. What happens in Haiti is important to the United States; Haiti is a neighbor whose stability and success bolsters our own security and that of the region. A Haiti that takes full responsibility for its own prosperous and democratic future is certainly in our interest. If confirmed, I will do my best to promote the U.S.-Haitian partnership and lead our talented U.S. interagency team at Embassy Port-au-Prince.

I appreciate your consideration of my nomination, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me.

Thank you.