

Statement of Eric Stromayer
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Togolese Republic
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 26, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to appear before you today and am grateful to the President and Secretary Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Togolese Republic. If confirmed, I will be honored and privileged to lead our Embassy team in working to advance the interests of the American people in Togo.

I am immensely proud today to be joined by my wife of almost 21 years, Susmita Dastidar, and two of our daughters, Antara Helena and Lalita Leonora. Our eldest, Aditi Alexandra is away at college. Also unable to join us is my 84-year old mother, Sarah. She and my father, Jim, introduced me to this career so many years ago. My father, who was a Foreign Service Officer, died tragically young in 1983, but their lessons of decency, integrity and patriotism have guided me throughout my life.

A recent commemoration of September 11 at the State Department and remembrances of the challenges all of us have faced over the years, reaffirmed for me all the reasons I am proud to be an American and to represent our nation overseas, if confirmed as an Ambassador.

My interest in West Africa began when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal in the early 1980s. My second assignment with the State Department was Burkina Faso, and I visited Togo overland several times during that three-year assignment. I have served in Africa as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affairs in Madagascar, senior positions in the Bureau of African Affairs over the last five years, and as a desk officer for several West African countries. These experiences and other postings around the world during my 29 years with the State Department have prepared me for this next challenge, if confirmed.

The United States and Togo enjoy a strong relationship and share broad mutual interests. Our policy priorities in Togo are to advance peace and security; promote fair trade and economic growth; strengthen democracy, human rights, and governance; and support opportunity and development. A stable, peaceful and prosperous Togo serves America's interests and expands Togo's ability to contribute to regional stability.

Our highest priority is to advance peace and security. Despite a small population, Togo is currently the 15th largest contributor of peacekeeping forces in the world. We continue to help professionalize its security forces. Togo's military is graduating from the US Africa Contingency Operations (ACOTA) to providing its own pre-deployment peacekeeping training, building capacity that I hope to continue to support if confirmed.

Togo has experienced some political instability over the past year. Despite broad consensus on several of the reforms, there is disagreement on the details, rooted in deep-seated mistrust between Togo's ruling party and an opposition that feels frozen out of power. If confirmed, I would support and emphasize rule of law, solid democratic institutions, and the role of civil society to encourage positive change.

The Government of Togo has improved the country's investment climate, with a special presidential body to expedite reforms. Togo's hosting of the African Growth and Opportunity Act forum provided momentum for modernizing its economy. Much work lies ahead. Increasing transparency, tackling corruption, and promoting trade and economic growth will be a major focus. A Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold program approved this year will help consolidate and extend these reforms, further opening the telecommunications market and improving land title registry – the two binding constraints holding back Togo's own efforts to lift its people out of poverty.

A fast-growing population has presented a significant youth unemployment challenge. The education system faces challenges from underfunding; infant mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDs and malaria remain a concern. Humanitarian assistance and supporting the work of private American organizations in the health and education sectors are areas I would focus on, if confirmed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee for this opportunity to appear before you. If confirmed, I will strive to reinforce our interests in a stable, prosperous and peaceful Togo, with the ability to contribute to regional stability and advocate for the safety and security of American citizens and our interests in Togo. I warmly welcome any questions.