

**Opening Testimony
For Dr. John Nkengasong
Nominee to be Ambassador-at-Large and U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 15, 2022**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee as the Ambassador-at-Large, Coordinator of the United States Government Activities to Combat HIV/AIDS Globally to lead and coordinate PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. I am immensely grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for entrusting me at this critical time as we face and fight the dual global pandemics of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19.

I want to thank my lovely wife Susan, and our three lovely children (Pete, Gladys, and Paul) for their patience and support all the years as they have followed me in multiple countries across the world as I pursue global health.

If confirmed, I would assume leadership of an unprecedented initiative with a long history of strong, unwavering bipartisan Congressional leadership and support and a proven track record of global life-saving work. Since 2003, when Congress and President George W. Bush created the initiative, PEPFAR has saved more than 21 million lives and prevented millions of HIV infections. PEPFAR has been strengthened over the last 19 years through continued American generosity and a conviction to finish the fight against AIDS.

Despite COVID-19, PEPFAR has proven remarkably resilient in protecting and advancing hard-fought HIV gains as well as creating the backbone to fight other health threats, including COVID-19. I know all this to be true, as I have lived it and seen it firsthand – the positive impact it has had on people around the globe.

PEPFAR is one of the most successful initiatives implemented through a whole-of-U.S. government approach, bringing the best of the United States to bear. If confirmed, I will draw upon my three decades of experience with programs and research in public health and HIV, specifically from the United States CDC, as well as my recent experiences as the first Director of the Africa CDC and other leadership roles in public health institutions, to humbly advance PEPFAR's mission, assure its continued success, collaborate with partner governments and communities, and sustain the strong partnership it enjoys with Congress.

If confirmed, I would be stepping into this role at a critical moment when the world is confronted with dual global pandemics. We have seen how COVID-19 has affected some progress in our HIV efforts with devastating results, but we have also witnessed how the health systems and institutions built and strengthened by PEPFAR's investments have been central to the COVID-19 response.

I have dedicated my service to improving public health by fighting diseases. My experience specific to HIV goes back more than 30 years. I served as Chief of Virology and the WHO Collaborating Center on HIV diagnostics at the Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp. I then served as the U.S. CDC's Acting Deputy Principal Director of the Center for Global Health, as well as an Associate Director within CDC's Division of Global HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis.

If confirmed, I will draw upon these experiences and focus on continuing our fight against HIV/AIDS in close collaboration with governments and communities, while also acknowledging and appreciating the broader context that will determine the success of our actions and the future of the PEPFAR program. As Director of the Africa CDC, I have seen how PEPFAR's investments in health systems over the past 19 years have strengthened—and in some cases, established—the fundamental health infrastructure, laboratories, surveillance systems, and human resources for health in the countries where it helps serve.

In the past, efforts around HIV were premised upon building these systems from the ground up. With these now in place, the goal has now shifted, and I believe our efforts must now ensure that these services and systems are sustainable and resilient to prevent and respond to HIV/AIDS in the future, as well as other diseases. For this to happen, it is my belief that we need to capitalize on the capacity and experience of those in the countries where we work, coming to the table with a deep respect for their perspectives and needs, taking account of their insights, their knowledge of local contexts, and their reservoirs of expertise. For such systems to be sustainable and keep infectious disease in check, we must act collectively to support the capabilities of local leaders and regional institutions and work in respectful partnership and accountability with them.

As we continue our fight toward sustaining epidemic control of HIV/AIDS in so many places, the key tasks ahead will involve diplomatic engagement and doubling down on evidence-based interventions to address local contexts.

I am humbled and privileged to appear before you today and to be considered to lead, if confirmed, truly one of the most remarkable, life-saving efforts ever. I look forward to answering your questions.