

Statement of Troy Fitrell
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
August 5, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea. I am proud to have my family here today: my wife Kathryn, a fellow Foreign Service Officer, and my children Madeleine and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service themselves.

Although my career has taken us all to several continents, we are drawn to and always thrilled to be in sub-Saharan Africa, where we have spent the majority of our assignments. My last assignment, as Director for West African Affairs was, like everyone's, shaken up by the pandemic, but the one and only trip I was able to take before the pandemic struck began in Guinea, where I had the pleasure of traveling up-country with my friend and colleague, Ambassador Simon Henshaw, whose passing was a shock to all who knew him. It would be a signal honor, if confirmed, to try to build on his work.

The relationship between the United States and Guinea has passed through various stages during Guinea's 63 years of independence, but we have always extended our hand in partnership, through support for nascent democratic institutions, productive economic initiatives, and supporting the Guinean people directly through effective education and health programs, including in response to the Ebola epidemic in 2014. Indeed, in this current pandemic, American investments in health systems paid off as Guinea sought to mitigate the ravages of COVID-19. In the midst of this crisis, however, Ebola raised its ugly head again earlier this year, and those American-supported institutions reacted swiftly and effectively, halting it this time in a matter of months and with minimal deaths.

Economically, Guinea is growing faster than anticipated, sustained mostly by strong mining activity, construction, and agriculture. U.S. companies have been in Guinea since the days of independence, and more are joining them every year. Recent investments in energy, infrastructure, mining, and banking show that when given a fair chance, the United States is the preferred partner. I do not minimize the challenges; there are opportunities in infrastructure precisely because so little

infrastructure exists. The challenges to doing business in Guinea are well-documented and recent political tensions only increase the level of difficulty.

As we partner with the Guinean people, we advocate for fundamental freedoms, we advocate for open political participation, and we advocate for justice and dignity. Guinea was born a nation of peace and leadership and the citizens of that country, the region, and the world need a Guinea that builds upon that history. Right now, Guineans rightfully express concern about peace and security both at home and in the region. If confirmed, I will encourage dialogue among the parties to strengthen political pluralism. Such dialogue can only succeed if all sides feel confident that there can be a positive outcome. We support efforts to reform Guinea's security institutions, with capacity-building efforts to bolster civilian protection, rule of law, and accountability. Guinea's troops have performed well in Mali, the most dangerous peacekeeping mission on earth, and we recognize Guinea for that contribution.

If confirmed as the 23rd U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea, I will support and encourage the ongoing democratic process. I will promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investment, and helping diversify Guinea's economy. And I will work to improve public health institutions, enhance Guinea's efforts against trafficking in persons, and strengthen our security partnership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers and so I would also like to thank your staffs for all they do to support you and your constituents every day. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Guinea and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit one day soon. I am happy to answer any questions.