

**Statement of Brian Shukan**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin**  
**Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**October 20, 2021**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have shown in me, and I wish to thank the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify.

I would also like to recognize my wife Clare for her love and support during the last 30 years and throughout our Foreign Service journey; my daughter Abigail, who is serving in the Department of Homeland Security; and my daughter Leah, a graduate student in Boston.

It has been a great privilege to serve the United States as a Foreign Service Officer for the past 26 years, beginning with my service at the U.S. Embassy in Cotonou, Benin, and for the past two years as chief of mission in Khartoum, Sudan, as we supported the Sudanese people's aspirations for a democratic and prosperous future.

Benin has been a strong example of peace, stability, and ethnic and religious tolerance in an increasingly turbulent region. Benin is a solid partner on shared goals of economic prosperity and regional peace and security. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and Congress to promote democratic, inclusive, and transparent governance and respect for human rights; support a prosperous and healthy society with closer trade linkages and stronger people to people ties with the United States; and strengthen regional security and address global threats such as violent extremism and transnational organized crime.

I would like to briefly highlight a few priorities in each of these areas, starting with promoting democratic and transparent governance and respect for human rights. I will never forget my experience in 1996 of seeing Beninese citizens patiently stand in long lines to vote in Benin's second democratic election, and witnessing a peaceful transfer of power between political parties. For nearly three decades, Benin had been a model of multi-party democracy in West Africa. It adopted a democratic constitution in 1990 and has held six consecutive presidential elections

with peaceful transitions of power. We have recently seen undue restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, arrests of members of the political opposition, and laws undermining electoral competitiveness. These developments contribute to our concern about anti-democratic trends in Benin.

If confirmed, I will support and encourage Benin to resume the positive role it once had in promoting peaceful democratic governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights in the region.

A second priority is developing a prosperous and healthy society with closer trade linkages to the United States. Benin remains one of the world's least developed countries. Over one-third of its population lives in poverty, and malnutrition has stunted the growth of nearly a third of Benin's children under five. If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy team, Congress, U.S. agencies, and our Beninese partners to promote a healthier and more prosperous future with growing trade and investment. I will also engage Benin's fast-growing youth population so that they better understand our longstanding commitment to a prosperous future for their country based on shared values and interests.

In fiscal year 2020, the U.S. government provided Benin \$28.2 million in bilateral assistance for programs that foster a healthier and more inclusive society by strengthening health services delivery and resources. The U.S. is also working to improve human rights and strengthen civil society. A five-year, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact, valued at \$391 million, entered into force in 2017. This compact is strengthening Benin's electricity sector, attracting private investment to Benin, and removing a major constraint to long-term economic growth. In 2017, the USDA launched a five-year \$21.3 million investment in food assistance to Benin, improving school age children's literacy and increasing class attendance by providing healthy meals at schools. USAID's Regional Mission also maintains economic growth and trade programs focusing on policy advocacy and technical assistance to build regional and global trade linkages and attract investment. If confirmed, I will guide these and other programs to partner with Benin for a more prosperous and peaceful future.

I also want to highlight the importance of strengthening regional security and addressing global threats such as violent extremism and transnational organized crime. Benin is a strong partner for peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel and has prioritized improving its counter terrorism capacity and preventing violent extremism. Our assistance to Benin's security forces supports Benin's participation in peacekeeping and regional security efforts, and advances

its ability to secure its own borders and interdict maritime and transnational organized crime. If confirmed, I will prioritize engaging with the Government of Benin on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism in the areas of security sector assistance, community building and youth development, and strategic communications.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance U.S. interests in Benin and would be pleased to take any questions.