

Statement of Rachna Korhonen
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Mali
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 3, 2022

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 U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Mali. I appreciate the confidence he and Secretary Blinken have shown in me through this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress and staff to advance U.S. interests in Mali.

Mr. Chairman, I joined the Foreign Service because of 9/11. That eventful day woke the need for service in me. I did not choose the Foreign Service; it chose me. It has taken me to India, Iraq, Kuwait, Sri Lanka, and Saudi Arabia (twice) and, if confirmed, to Mali.

A few months ago, Secretary Blinken appropriately observed that "Mali remains a linchpin for future stability in the Sahel and we have deep concerns about that stability and deep concerns about the extremism and terrorism that is spreading tentacles in the region. This is ultimately about the people of Mali and their aspirations for peace, their aspirations for development and respect for human rights."

Security partnerships in Mali have shifted in the last year with the departure of European counterterrorism forces and the arrival of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. The human rights violations and abuses allegedly committed are not only horrific but will push aggrieved civilians into the ranks of terrorist groups. If confirmed, I will work to counter Russian disinformation attempts to veil the true harm and cost of Wagner's actions. Additionally, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is facing unprecedented challenges due to restrictions placed on it. I will advocate for the free movement of MINUSMA peacekeepers, and for conditions that allow the resumption of accountable international security assistance to counter the spread of terrorism across the country.

If confirmed, I look forward to leading Embassy Bamako in advancing U.S. interests in Mali. Our main interests include bringing the country back to a constitutional democracy that helps all its citizens; furthering economic development; and countering the incursion of terrorism that threatens not only Mali

but the rest of the Sahel. We welcome the agreement to a 24-month timeline between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the transition government. If confirmed, I look forward to shaping U.S. activities to encourage constructive participation in Mali's democratic transition and 2024 elections. Malians have shown before that they can be the shining light of the region.

U.S. assistance in Mali promotes democracy and improved governance while supporting sustainable livelihoods. USAID's health programs reach 80 percent of Mali's population. NIH and CDC have built solid public health systems that met the Ebola challenge in the past, helped mitigate the impact of COVID, and promise to make inroads in the global fight against malaria. These programs are closely integrated with our democracy and counterterrorism goals in a well-coordinated interagency effort. If confirmed, I will work together with our interagency and international partners to maintain strong partnerships for development and stability. We are committed to the Malian people and their aspiration for responsive democratic governance.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my highest priority will be the protection of Americans and American interests, including Mission personnel. Moreover, I will carefully and diligently ensure responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars through effective leadership of U.S. Embassy Bamako's strong interagency team.

Mr. Chairman, you see sitting before you the ultimate American dream. I am a proud immigrant girl from New Jersey who has had the good fortune to be nominated to represent these United States. So much of who I am belongs to my parents Paul and Meena Sachdeva. I wish my grandfather were alive; he would have been so proud. But the most important person in my life is sitting behind me, my husband, Juha. I would not be here today without him. He and our three children, Varun, Vicram, and Veera are what make life worth living. I am deeply grateful to them for their support and love.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with all of you and would hope to welcome you to Bamako during my tenure. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.