

Testimony of Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
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U.S. Policy in Central Africa: The Imperative of Good Governance
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Thank you Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and other Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on the many challenges and opportunities facing countries in the Central African region. I am pleased to be here with my friend and colleague Tom Perriello, the Secretary's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. Tom just returned from his most recent trip to the region and will provide more detail on key aspects of our policy approach in the region and his own ceaseless efforts in this area.

In the Central African region, particularly in the countries of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Republic of the Congo, our efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, spur economic growth, advance peace and security, and promote opportunity and development continue to be not only a Bureau but a whole of government priority. The leaders of several of these nations have made, or will soon have the opportunity to make, important decisions to support or not support an independent electoral process and realize a true democratic transfer of power. Despite our efforts to encourage these leaders to ensure their legacy by stepping down and allowing the healthy alternation that is an essential component of any democracy, I must report that previous commitments by some leaders in the region to support independently run and credible electoral processes, as well as to respect presidential term limits, were not honored or are now in doubt.

Burundi:

We are deeply concerned with the continuing violence in Burundi. We have been engaged in concerted efforts to prevent the escalation of the crisis to mass atrocities or more widespread violence and focused on three pillars: pressing the

Government of Burundi and opposition members to reach a political resolution to the crisis through internationally-mediated dialogue; increasing the international presence on the ground by supporting the deployment of African Union and UN monitors, observers, and peacekeepers; and ensuring accountability for those responsible for the violence.

The crisis in Burundi escalated on December 11 when at least 87 people – but likely several hundred – were killed in a disproportionate response by government security forces following attacks on several military installations in and around Bujumbura by an armed insurgent force. Multiple credible reports indicate security forces searched homes, stole money from residents, and dragged away young male residents of the Nyakabiga neighborhood, some of whom have not been seen again. Since then, there have been periodic spikes of violence committed by government forces and the armed insurgency. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reported recently on unprecedented human rights violations and abuses taking place in Burundi. These include witness reports of the presence of mass graves, a sharp increase in alleged enforced disappearances and torture, and reports of sexual violence perpetrated by security forces. We continue to urge the Government of Burundi, at the highest levels, to permit an immediate, impartial investigation into these allegations and to hold accountable all those found responsible for these crimes. Such an investigation can be conducted by human rights monitors from the African Union, who are currently in Bujumbura but whose work to date has been blocked by the government of Burundi. The government is also making unreasonable and unacceptable demands to jointly author and approve the reports of these monitors, and to be present during the monitors’ activities.

A regionally mediated dialogue process led by Uganda on behalf of the East African Community (EAC) relaunched on December 28 in Entebbe, Uganda after a six month delay, and following significant pressure from the United States and other members of the international community. A proposed follow-up meeting in Arusha on January 6 was postponed after the Government of Burundi refused to attend. Efforts are underway to bring the government and opposition together in a follow-on meeting this month, and we understand that Uganda’s Defense Minister

and facilitator of the peace talks, Crispus Kiyonga, will meet with Burundian government officials to discuss a possible way forward. The Government of Burundi developed its own National Commission for Inter-Burundian dialogue (CNDI) in October and, after weeks of preparatory meetings, it commenced an internal dialogue on January 19. We do not expect much out of this internal dialogue, as it lacks credibility, funding, and externally-based opposition membership, and is taking place in an environment characterized by fear, repression, and lack of freedom of expression.

The African Union's Peace and Security Council's (AUPSC) December 17 tentative authorization for the deployment of the African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU) to help bring an end to the violence and prevent the situation from spiraling out of control was soundly rejected by the government of Burundi. The government stated publicly that it would treat African Union troops as invaders if they are deployed. During the January African Union Summit, the AU's 15-member Peace and Security Council determined that it was premature to deploy the African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU) to Burundi. Two days later, however, the entire AU Assembly of Heads of State, under the leadership of President Idriss Deby of Chad, decided to send a delegation of African heads of state to Bujumbura to urge President Nkurunziza to restart the inclusive dialogue process. In the press release announcing the delegation of five heads of state from each of the major African regions, the AU highlighted that part of the delegation's mandate will be to consult with the Government of Burundi on the deployment of the MAPROBU. In fact, our understanding is that there are ongoing efforts to deploy additional human rights and military observers to augment the very limited human rights and military observers currently on the ground.

Ambassador Power and her UN Security Council counterparts traveled to Burundi last month and met with President Nkurunziza, various political parties, and civil society groups. UN Security Council members seem to have gained a greater appreciation for the dire situation in Burundi and we will continue to ensure that international attention and pressure continues. At the request of the United States, the UN Human Rights Council held a special session on Burundi on December 17 and adopted a resolution asking the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently send a team of independent experts to investigate the

human rights situation there. That team's first visit, scheduled for January 26, has been delayed by a lack of response from the Government of Burundi. The independent experts will make another attempt to travel to Burundi in late February. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights will also continue the full investigation until August, during which the team of independent experts plans to make two additional visits to Burundi.

We have joined our donor partners in increasing the costs for the regime and for the armed opposition for their use of repression and violence. On December 18, the United States added two pro-government and two opposition individuals to our Burundi sanctions list, bringing the total number to eight individuals who have been sanctioned for being responsible for or complicit in actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, or stability of the country. Last May we suspended in-country delivery of the Train and Equip mission of our Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance peacekeeping program due to security concerns, as well as provision of assistance under the African Military Education Program (AMEP). Burundi still contributes battalions to AMISOM to stabilize the situation in Somalia, and contributes one battalion and two Formed Police Units (FPU) to MINUSCA in the Central African Republic. The ongoing crisis has put these contributions under increased scrutiny. We also suspended International Law Enforcement Academy and Anti-Terrorism Assistance training that had been provided to Burundian law enforcement agencies. We withdrew AGOA trade preference benefits from Burundi on January 1. What remains is humanitarian or crisis resolution assistance focused on continuing our critical health services to the people of Burundi and promoting reconciliation and dialogue among youth. We also provide aid that reduces malnutrition among children and improves maternal healthcare.

Democratic Republic of the Congo:

I'll now turn to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Before I get into the electoral and security situations, however, I'd like to explain our position on an issue that has become a significant wedge in our bilateral relations: the continued suspension of exit permits for internationally adopted children. In September 2013, the Congolese government suspended the issuance of exit permits for internationally adopted children after noting an increase in adoption

applications from foreigners. The Congolese government cited concerns about the welfare of adopted children, and possible corruption within its adoption process. As you know, despite the exit permit ban, DRC courts have continued to issue adoption decrees.

Over the past two years, U.S. officials have regularly engaged with DRC officials at many levels to lift the ban for the hundreds of legally adopted children unable to join their new families. President Obama called President Joseph Kabila last March to urge him to action. Secretary Kerry has pressed President Kabila to resolve this matter on several occasions. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Michele Bond traveled to the DRC in March, August, and December 2015, Special Envoy Perriello met with President Kabila in August, and Under Secretary Sewall met him in November. Bureau of African Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary Stuart Symington also engaged government officials there in August. Dr. Jill Biden sent a letter to President Kabila's sister, Jaynet Kabila, in September urging her to consider the humanitarian implications for the children. I spoke with the Congolese Foreign Minister about the adoptions issue when I met with him in September, raised the issue at the recent AU Summit, and have engaged the Congolese Ambassador to the United States on a regular basis. And of course Ambassador Swann and his team at our Embassy in Kinshasa has engaged tirelessly on this priority matter from the beginning of the suspension. Our efforts are also being matched with similar high-level engagement by other countries, primarily in Western Europe, whose citizens have also adopted children from the DRC. I appreciate that many in Congress have made the resolution of this impasse a priority.

We have seen ostensible movement – namely the recent DRC Council of Ministers approval and submission of new draft legislation on adoptions to Parliament and a reconstruction of an Inter-ministerial Commission to review the outstanding cases. Nevertheless, we have been down this road before. For almost 30 months the Congolese government has promised to resolve this issue and has, to date, failed to do so. As a result, approximately 400 children legally adopted by U.S. citizens - along with an additional 700 adopted by families from other countries - continue waiting for properly issued exit permits from the DRC government. Tragically, we have also learned that several legally adopted children have died in the DRC while waiting to be united with their adoptive families.

Simply put, we will not be satisfied until these promises are fulfilled. I want to assure you – Members of Congress and your constituents who anxiously wait to bring their children home – this issue remains a priority for the Department. And we will not relent in our efforts until all of these cases are resolved.

We remain deeply concerned by the developing political crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over the past decade, the DRC has slowly emerged from the 1996-2003 era of what many have called Africa's World War, which saw over 5.8 million civilians killed by war and related disease. In 2006 and 2011, Congolese citizens voted in the first democratic elections the country had seen since its independence in 1960. The 2006 elections, while generally lauded as a success, were heavily supported by the international community with funding and logistical support. While the subsequent 2011 elections took place on time, they were criticized as seriously flawed and lacking in transparency. These two electoral cycles ushered in some economic and social progress, including the construction of urban infrastructure, and GDP growth rates upwards of nine percent per year.

The DRC's 2006 constitution, which represents to many Congolese the completion of a process that brought much-needed peace, provides for the President to serve two consecutive five-year terms. President Kabila's final term is due to end this December 20th. Efforts by some members of the president's parliamentary alliance to suggest amending the constitution to remove or change existing term limits and measures seemingly intended to delay elections, have been vigorously resisted by the opposition, including some former members of the presidential majority alliance who have joined the opposition, and by many prominent civil society organizations. Even over the last several weeks, we have witnessed small-scale protests and the government's narrowing of political space in reaction to them.

Special Envoy Perriello will go into more detail on our analysis and approach to the situation, but I must note that, at this time, the DRC risks a political confrontation over respect for the constitution, including term limits, with potentially disastrous results for the people of the DRC and the region. President Kabila faces a choice to solidify his legacy as the first democratically- elected President in the DRC's history to establish a tradition of peaceful transition of

power; or, he can attempt to remain in office, undermining his legacy and ushering in an era of instability that will significantly set back the progress that has been made during his tenure. We firmly believe the future of the DRC's growth and stability rests on the decisions and actions President Kabila is taking right now.

The programs the United States government funds, the policies we support, and the messages we deliver to all actors in the DRC, including President Kabila, promote accountable, transparent, responsive governance that supports justice and respect for human rights. In our FY 2017 foreign assistance request for DRC, we seek substantial increases in funding for programs to advance peace and security, and to strengthen democratic institutions. A total of \$30 million has been requested to strengthen democratic institutions and processes, almost twice as much as the FY 2015 actual level of \$16 million. We are also seeking a substantial increase in funding to support conflict mitigation and reconciliation programs. Our goal continues to be focused on strengthening political parties, building rule of law, demanding justice and accountability for human rights violations and mass atrocities, promote voter and civic education, provide technical electoral assistance, and building knowledge about the U.S.-DRC relationship through public diplomacy programs. The DRC's eligibility for renewed benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) will take into consideration the holding of free, fair, and on-time national elections to promote an enabling environment for trade and investment.

It is our grim assessment that the risk of mass atrocities in the DRC will sharply increase should President Kabila continue to make efforts to extend his mandate. It is our considered assessment that a choice by President Kabila to honor the Congolese constitution and the wishes of the Congolese people to hold free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections, with President Kabila gracefully transitioning power, has the greatest hope for continuation of the legacy of economic and social progress made during President Kabila's tenure as President. In contrast, disregarding the constitution and the will of his people, and holding on to power, runs the greatest risk of widespread instability and violence, and those gains – and his legacy – being significantly eroded, if not completely lost.

We continue to engage with the government, UN agencies, and civil society to ensure civilian protection in the event of instability and to bring to justice those who direct and perpetrate violence against civilians.

We welcome the recent agreement for the resumption of cooperation between the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the DRC government. Such cooperation would be aimed at protecting civilians and, as promised since this time last year, taking on and eliminating the Allied Defense Forces (ADF), currently responsible for numerous massacres and other atrocities over the past two years, and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and other illegal armed groups that continue to wreak havoc across the east of the country, and which might take advantage of any potential political crisis to expand their power through murder, rape, and pillage. At the same time, we eagerly await results on the ground, not merely the issuance of a statement of renewed cooperation. Only with the establishment of sustainable peace and stability will the Congolese be able to realize the full benefits of our substantial support in promoting the welfare of Congolese citizens, especially in the areas of health and education.

Rwanda:

As we have publicly noted, we were deeply disappointed that Rwandan President Paul Kagame missed the opportunity to set an historic example and provide the leadership to set his own country on a firm foundation of strong democratic institutions and systems that can sustain the economic and development progress that Rwanda has made in the past twenty years and serve as an example to the region. His decision to seek a third term in office came shortly after a referendum in which Rwandans agreed to modify the country's constitution to permit Kagame to serve up to three more terms. We believe that constitutional transitions of power are essential for strong democracies, and that efforts initiated by incumbents to modify the rules so that they can remain in power ultimately weaken democratic institutions. We are particularly concerned by constitutional changes that favor one individual over the principle of peaceful democratic transitions, as was the case here.

We believe that the future for Rwanda remains in the hands of the people of Rwanda, and it is therefore very important for the government to develop the institutions and systems of democracy -- including a free, open, and independent media; strong, independent civil society; and systems that will support peaceful, democratic transitions of power. It is these institutions that will enable the people of Rwanda to chart their own democratic future. We have all witnessed Rwanda's progress in improving its business environment to achieve substantial gains in economic development. It is now time for Rwanda to apply the same energy and will to transforming the political environment as well. Some initial steps could include:

- Streamlining the registration and reporting processes for NGOs and media organizations to make them as straightforward and rapid as registering a business,
- Reinvigorating and reaffirming the independence and authority of the Rwanda Media Commission,
- Ensuring that political parties are free to organize and peacefully advocate for alternative policies, and
- Beginning now to publicly debate and examine the institutions that will be necessary to ensure smooth, competitive, and open democratic transitions of power.

It will also be critical for the government to allow, even to encourage, the free and unfettered expression of dissent and peaceful opposition, particularly in the run-up to local elections in 2016, Presidential elections in 2017, and Parliamentary elections in 2018.

We continue to engage the Government of Rwanda on longstanding human rights concerns, including respect for legal provisions on detention and treatment of individuals held in prisons and transit centers, and greater public accountability for Rwanda's police and military. With the strong forward progress being made by the government in other areas – the human development factors, the economy, business, and combating poverty – one would expect to see the government also desire to be a leader in the area of human rights and democracy. We certainly wish

we were in a position to praise those aspects of their governance and will continue to engage senior government officials on the importance of making progress on this issue.

I would also like to address Rwanda's role in the Great Lakes region. Rwanda currently hosts more than 75,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some of whom have lived in Rwanda for nearly twenty years. This year, more than 70,000 Burundians who have fled the political strife in their home country have found shelter in Rwanda, both in urban areas and refugee camps. Rwanda's partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—supported in large part by the United States—has ensured that all refugees receive shelter, nutrition, education, and health care services that are among the most comprehensive in the region. Rwanda has demonstrated through these acts that they willingly and generously shoulder their obligation to shelter refugees.

We are concerned, however, by credible reports that recruitment of Burundian refugees – including children – may have occurred in Rwanda in the past year, with training provided to facilitate their participation in armed groups seeking to overthrow through violent means the government of Burundi. We have raised our concerns about this with the government of Rwanda, which has promised to investigate these reports and to take appropriate action to prevent recruitment from occurring. Now is not the time for the people of Rwanda, Burundi and the wider region to see a repeat of the crisis and violence that surrounded the M23 militia in the eastern DRC a few years ago. Much as Rwanda plays a critical role supporting peacekeeping operations across Africa, it is essential that Rwanda play a constructive role in supporting regional stability, and we appreciate the public and private commitment of Rwanda's leaders to support a political and not a military solution to the crisis in Burundi. We will continue to closely monitor developments in this area.

Central African Republic (CAR):

In the Central African Republic, the constitutional referendum and the December 30th first round of presidential elections were peaceful with a reported voter participation rate of 79 percent, which hints at a brighter future after over

three years of gross insecurity, conflict, and political transition. Parliamentary elections, however, were annulled by CAR's Constitutional Court after evidence came to light of a number of irregularities. These elections are scheduled to be conducted again on February 14. Despite these challenges, the final steps in CAR's transition show clearly that Central Africans seek a new beginning for their country, and a future based on democratic governance and free from the violence and instability that have plagued the country for far too long. The United States whole-heartedly supports the people of the Central African Republic in their pursuit of these goals and commends the efforts of the transitional authorities, the UN, French and other international forces, and, of course, the Central Africans themselves, for their commitment to seeing this process advance.

The final round of the presidential elections will also be held on February 14, and we are watching closely the two leading presidential candidates – Anicet George Dologuele and Faustin Touadera – as well as the losing presidential candidates who failed to make it beyond the first round.

On the ground, Ambassador Jeff Hawkins assumed his position in October 2015, just over one year after we resumed embassy operations. Ambassador Hawkins and members of the embassy team are doing tremendous work under challenging living and working conditions, constantly engaging with political figures, international counterparts, and Central Africans of all walks of life to encourage continued peaceful and tolerant progress. In the lead-up to the first round of presidential elections, Ambassador Hawkins several times visited the predominately Muslim PK5 neighborhood of Bangui – a flashpoint for conflict over the past several years – to bring positive attention to those living in the neighborhood under challenging conditions. In addition, Embassy Bangui continues to play an important, and at times leading, role amongst the international actors known as the 'G8' on the ground in Bangui, who are helping Central African authorities push the political transition forward and address security and development challenges.

In the last two years, the United States has provided nearly \$800 million in support to the people of CAR, including our assessed contributions to MINUSCA, life-saving humanitarian aid, elections assistance, and long-term development support. Let me highlight the nearly \$5 million in assistance the United States

provided to help CAR authorities to draft an inclusive electoral code, support the UN's efforts to provide elections security at polling stations throughout the country, and educate Central Africans on their rights and responsibilities as voters. We have also provided over \$275 million in critical humanitarian assistance that has helped support those who suffered tremendously from the years of violence, lack of government service, and instability created by the actions of armed groups and bandits. Longer term, the United States is providing nearly \$25 million in support of the clear call by Central Africans at last year's national dialogue – the Burundi Forum – for an end to impunity by helping rebuild CAR's rule of law institutions like the courts and police, hold accountable those who committed heinous acts of sexual and gender-based violence, and bring legal processes to remote corners of CAR where judicial officials have been absent for years.

Lord's Resistance Army:

With regard to the ongoing efforts to help end the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), I am pleased to report that with U.S. support, the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF), has reduced the number of LRA attacks on innocent civilians. In recent years, defections and releases from the LRA have significantly increased, including over 270 people who have either defected, escaped, or been released since 2012. This includes four of the LRA's top five commanders, including ICC indictee Dominic Ongwen who defected in January 2015. In addition, in June 2015, seven members of Joseph Kony's personal security detail defected. Today, we are proud to note that the number of people displaced by the LRA has dropped dramatically since 2010, and we estimate the LRA now has fewer than 150 fighters (plus another 150-200 women and children captives), a sizeable decrease compared to 2009 when it had over 1,000 fighters. Our successes have changed the nature of the LRA threat to the Central African region, and as a result, the LRA has divided its fighters into several small groups, spread across eastern Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the disputed area of Kafia Kingi where the LRA's attacks focus more on supporting their own individual survival.

That said, Joseph Kony remains at large, and LRA fighters continue to launch attacks on civilians and traffic wildlife and diamonds. A recent uptick in

attacks attributed to the LRA in eastern CAR indicates the LRA is still a destabilizing force in the region, and the LRA's involvement in the illicit wildlife and mineral trade has regional and global implications on our ability to protect fragile wildlife populations. We remain committed to working with our regional partners to continue degrading the LRA and, ultimately, remove Kony from the battlefield.

Republic of the Congo:

U.S. bilateral relations with the Republic of Congo are generally cordial, but have been tested in recent months over the issue of presidential term limits. The government has announced that presidential elections are scheduled to take place on March 20. While President Sassou N'Guesso has not formally declared his candidacy, he is widely expected to run, having spent 32 of the past 37 years in power. He has an historic opportunity to begin to establish a tradition of peaceful, democratic transition of power from one leader elected in modern, multiparty Congo to another. The U.S. government has privately and publicly expressed its position that peaceful, democratic alternation makes for a healthy democracy. We have publicly called on the Government of Congo to respect its citizens' rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, which are fundamental to a stable, democratic society and are key rights guaranteed in the new Congolese constitution promulgated on November 6.

The new constitution was the result of a deeply flawed constitutional referendum process held October 25. While the new constitution does include term limits, it also permits the long-serving incumbent to run again and potentially remain president for 15 more years. We have continued to support the implementation of genuine electoral reforms that will improve the credibility of the electoral process and create the necessary confidence in the system to inspire voter participation. We are encouraged that in January a new electoral law was enacted that included some previously-agreed-upon electoral governance reforms, such as the use of a single ballot as an anti-fraud measure. These reforms could – if fully enacted – result in a net improvement in the conduct of elections. But it remains to be seen just how independent the new National Independent Electoral Commission will be. Considering the accelerated date of the presidential election, we are

concerned that not enough time remains to enact and implement genuine electoral reform prior to the March 20th elections.

On a disturbing note, dozens of opposition supporters have been arbitrarily arrested since October, and opposition leaders have been subjected to harassment and intimidation. We have strongly encouraged the government to respect the provisions of its new constitution that guarantee respect for human rights, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly. We are grateful to Representative LoBiondo who, on a visit to Brazzaville in late January, emphasized to Congolese government officials with whom he met the importance of adhering to these principles. Additionally, the State Department and USTR have notified the government of the Congo that continued eligibility for AGOA benefits will take into consideration their adherence to these basic freedoms, especially during the lead-up and administration of the upcoming election.

As we near the March election, we continue to press Congolese officials to conduct a free, fair, and transparent electoral process. On January 22, during a meeting with Congolese First Lady Antoinette Sassou N'Gusso and in subsequent remarks that received ample media play in the Congo, Ambassador Sullivan reiterated U.S. policy that political alternation is necessary for the health of any democratic system of governance. On January 27, she also called for equitable media access and professionalism in the media to avoid spreading misinformation.

We continue to encourage all citizens to express themselves peacefully and engage in the democratic process. We have urged the opposition to participate in the elections rather than boycott the process. Some opposition groups have stated their willingness to participate, provided conditions for a more level playing field are in place.

Uganda:

I briefly want to take this opportunity to express concern over the electoral environment in Uganda in the run-up to the country's national election, to be held February 18. Continued reports of the police using excessive force, obstruction and dispersal of some opposition rallies, and harassment of journalists contribute to a climate of fear and intimidation, and could raise questions about the fairness of the process. It is important to underscore the need for all candidates and their

campaigns to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that could incite violence. We note with particular concern the reports that Christopher Aine, an opposition campaign aide, has disappeared, and we urge anyone with information about his whereabouts to come forward.

Free and fair elections depend on all Ugandans being able to exercise their right to assemble peacefully, express their opinions, and participate in the electoral process free from intimidation and abuse. They also depend on government institutions and security forces remaining neutral, defending the rights of all people and protecting all parties equally. We call on the government, civil society, and political parties to do their part to ensure a peaceful, transparent and credible electoral process.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the committee, thank you again for holding this hearing and giving me the opportunity to discuss our extensive engagement in the region. We will continue our diplomatic efforts and coordinate with members of the international community to help address the issues facing the Central African region. I hope this information is helpful to the committee. I am glad to answer any questions you might have.

