

Statement of Harry K. Thomas Jr.

Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Zimbabwe

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

October 1, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Obama, Secretary Kerry, and Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe. Please permit me to thank my family for their support especially my wife and partner Mithi Aquino-Thomas, a human resources instructor, my sister Nelda Canada, a retired paralegal, my cousins Ray and Jen Boyd, retired U.S. Government officials, and Sharon Boyd, who works for the Fairfax County Police. I would like to add my sincere appreciation to my mom Hildonia Thomas, a former teacher and social worker, and my late father Harry Thomas Sr. whose guidance and love gave me the opportunity to be before you today. A special thanks to my in-laws Col. Aquino and Doctor Aquino for their faith and trust in me. Finally, our three children Casey, Emmanuel Miguel, and Zoe are away at university but with us today in spirit.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my top priorities will be to ensure the security and safety of American citizens and to advance the interests and values of the United States and the American people.

I am excited at the possibility of returning to Zimbabwe where I previously served our nation during a time of relative harmony. It is the land where our daughter Casey learned to walk, talk, and respect the wonderful people of Zimbabwe. It is where I visited the beautiful and important game parks that must be protected, saw the historic Great Zimbabwe ruins, experienced the wondrous Victoria Falls and witnessed the excitement the entire world shared when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and paid his initial visit to Harare as an example of forgiveness, tolerance, and respect for human rights. With full recognition of the complex challenges Zimbabwe faces, I remain optimistic about the country's future and believe that the United States has an important role to play in helping the people of Zimbabwe build a just, free, and prosperous nation. The trajectory of Zimbabwe's recent past should not obscure the nation's tremendous potential. Though battered by more than a decade of political strife, economic decline, and challenges to its health systems, Zimbabwe retains a foundational human and physical infrastructure upon which it can build a strong future. It is in the interest of the United States to be a partner in that process and, if confirmed, I will

continue the work of building productive and respectful relationships with all Zimbabweans of goodwill.

The United States has shown its deep and abiding concern for Zimbabwe through the nearly one billion dollars in humanitarian relief and health-related assistance we have provided to its people just in the last decade. There is no more explicit expression of our support for the people of Zimbabwe than our standing by them through their times of greatest need. We need, however, to prepare to move beyond a relationship defined by aid. Zimbabweans are fully capable of feeding themselves, meeting the nation's health and education needs, building a dynamic political system, and restoring what was once one of the strongest economies in Africa. Zimbabwe can and should be a nation of economic opportunities, of respect for the rule of law and the human rights of all people. Those are values that reflect the core of what Americans share with Zimbabweans and that we should pursue together.

U.S. policy in Zimbabwe is not about regime change. Only the people of Zimbabwe have the ability to change their government. Our policies support principles, not parties or people. When, however, self-determination is denied, as it is in Zimbabwe through political violence, fraudulent and mismanaged elections, and restrictions on the right and opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the United States cannot ignore such human rights violations. We have

taken principled steps to demonstrate our concern about the actions of those responsible for, and those who profit from, miscarriages of the promise Zimbabwe offered at independence. We will consistently stand for the rights of Zimbabweans to participate fully in their nation's political processes.

If confirmed, I will work to enable Zimbabwe to become a just, prosperous, and democratic state that meets the needs of its people, contributes to security and development in the region, and plays an important role in world affairs. That was U.S. policy in 1980 when we were the first nation to recognize Zimbabwe's independence, and it continues to be our policy. We will not always agree with the government of Zimbabwe, but we will always attempt to maintain a respectful and open dialogue.

The United States seeks the full implementation of the 2013 Constitution; credible, lasting democratic reforms; and respect for human rights and rule of law by the Government of Zimbabwe. If confirmed, I will work with towards those objectives, which could be a trigger for the United States to open a much more dynamic relationship.

If confirmed, I will give special attention to the welfare and security of American citizens in Zimbabwe and to meeting with people from across the rich spectrum of Zimbabwe's society, making an assessment of the situation there and

offering recommendations on the best way forward. As we continue to urge democratic development, we must also continue to invest in the people of Zimbabwe – the health, people-to-people exchanges, humanitarian aid, and business development work – to preserve the human capital needed to re-build Zimbabwe in the years ahead. I have faith that with this support, once given the opportunity to communicate, organize, and express their will, the people of Zimbabwe will find the best path forward and pursue it successfully. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and I would be happy to answer questions.