

**Statement of Peter Vrooman
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
December 19, 2017**

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

It is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. I thank President Trump and Secretary Tillerson for the trust they have placed in me by nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work closely with this Committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Rwanda.

I would like to recognize my wife, Johnette, and our children, Zarah and Hendrick, who are here today. Without their love, strength, and support, I would not be here. My mother, Sally, is here too, from upstate New York. Her encouragement first propelled me into the field of foreign affairs, from my time as a Rotary International Foundation “ambassador of goodwill” in 1986 to a junior Foreign Service Officer in 1991 and an ambassadorial nominee today. My brother, Eric, has travelled from Minneapolis to be here, and my other brother, Bruce, is watching from New Hampshire.

If confirmed, my first priority will be to ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens in Rwanda, whether they are representing our country as diplomats, working in NGOs or faith-based organizations, conducting business, traveling on vacation, or serving in the Peace Corps. My goals will be to sustain our development partnership while reducing Rwanda’s aid dependency, promote U.S. exports and business ties, advance the rule of law and human rights in Rwanda, and encourage Rwanda’s continued role in peacekeeping.

The United States has a strong partnership with Rwanda. The Rwandan people have crossed many milestones along the trajectory of recovery, reconciliation, and rebuilding since the horrific 1994 genocide. In the past ten years, Rwanda lifted more than one million of its 11 million citizens out of poverty and doubled per capita GDP in that same period. Since the year 2000, Rwanda has reduced its budgetary reliance on foreign assistance from 86 percent to 35 percent.

Rwanda has worked hard to meet the basic needs of its population for potable water, roads, primary education, and health care. For example, Rwanda’s focus on combatting the HIV/AIDS epidemic over the past decade has resulted in a

reduction of new HIV infections by almost 50 percent between 2006 and 2016. Maternal and under-five mortality have also both dropped by more than 50 percent. These and other critical gains in the health sector have occurred with support from our foreign assistance, including the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), USAID's Maternal and Child Health programs, and the work of Peace Corps volunteers in rural communities.

Rwanda encourages private sector investment. We have been the largest investor in Rwanda, and U.S. citizens are its largest source of tourism. U.S. companies are bringing innovative ideas in water treatment, energy generation, aviation, and logistics to Rwanda, creating jobs in both our countries. If confirmed, I will promote a Rwanda that remains open to U.S. business, trade, and investment as it pursues continued economic growth.

Respect for human rights and democratic practices remain areas of great importance to our bilateral relationship. They are critical for Rwanda's continued prosperity, regional leadership, and partnership with the United States. If confirmed, I will work with the Rwandan government and civil society to encourage a Rwanda that adheres to the democratic ideals enshrined in its constitution. These include the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights, pluralistic democracy, equitable power sharing, tolerance, and resolution of issues through dialogue.

Rwanda is one of the world's most committed countries to international peacekeeping operations – the fifth-largest contributor of troops in the world and the second-largest contributor of police to international peacekeeping missions. Rwandan peacekeepers have served with distinction in many of the world's most complicated and protracted conflicts, including the Central African Republic, Haiti, South Sudan, and Sudan. Rwanda championed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, a set of best practices for protecting civilians during peacekeeping missions. If confirmed, I will encourage Rwanda to continue to play a positive role in peacekeeping in Africa and within the African Union, as President Kagame assumes the role of AU Chairperson for one year starting in January 2018.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity and honor to appear before you today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.