

**Statement of Michele Thoren Bond  
Ambassador-Designate to the Kingdom of Lesotho  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho. I appreciate the confidence of the President and Secretary Clinton in putting my name forward for your consideration. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests and partnering with Lesotho to fulfill its commitment to democracy, social services, and economic prosperity for all Basotho.

In my thirty-three years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have served in a number of positions related to the developing world and have seen firsthand the important role that the United States plays in partnering with countries as they work to eradicate poverty and instability while granting a voice to all citizens. My experience as a Deputy Assistant Secretary in Consular Affairs and as Consul General in Amsterdam, as well as my work in the fledgling democracies that emerged from the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, will enhance my effectiveness in assisting Lesotho to consolidate its successes, while effectively managing our Mission to further U.S. goals of stability and economic development and to protect Americans and American interests.

A democratic, peaceful and prosperous Lesotho serves American principles and interests and contributes to regional stability. The United States has had a long

friendship with Lesotho, dating from 1967 when we were one of the first four countries to establish an embassy there following its independence from Great Britain. Our country remains a strong supporter of Lesotho's efforts to reinforce its democratic gains. However, following national elections in 2007, a dispute over Parliamentary seat allocation emerged, which remains unresolved to this day. To avoid such disputes in the national elections in 2012, electoral reform is essential. Working constructively with the Government of Lesotho on strengthening democratic institutions and the electoral process will be among my top priorities.

If confirmed, I will also work diligently with the Government of Lesotho on important transnational and regional issues, such as trafficking in persons and climate change. On the latter issue, Lesotho plays a leadership role for the Least Developed Countries and has associated with the Copenhagen Climate Accord.

Sadly, Lesotho has a 23.2 percent HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, the third highest in the world, with the United Nations predicting that this rate will rise to 36 percent within the next 15 years. Recent statistics estimate that life expectancy has fallen to an average of just 40 years as a result. This pandemic has tragic consequences for all aspects of Lesotho's social and economic development. If confirmed, one of my primary goals will be to continue the successful U.S. programs that help Lesotho train health care professionals, treat the infected, and promote prevention of HIV/AIDS, and the other diseases that occur with it such as tuberculosis.

As the largest bilateral donor, the United States plays a vital role in Lesotho's efforts to boost economic development and improve its citizens' standard

of living. If confirmed, I will continue our close coordination with the Government of Lesotho so that our assistance meets shared development goals. In 2007 Lesotho signed a Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact for \$363 million dollars to develop Lesotho's water and sanitation systems, healthcare infrastructure and private sector investment climate. Lesotho also has worked diligently to develop a textile industry to take advantage of trade benefits under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) but is struggling to maintain those gains. If confirmed, I pledge to ensure that the benefits of the Compact are shared by all the people of Lesotho and to encourage investments to spur job creation and entrepreneurship.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.