

**STATEMENT OF AUBREY HOOKS
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE REPUBLIC OF COTE D'IVOIRE
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

April 28, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I wish to express my gratitude to President Bush and to Secretary Powell for the trust and confidence that they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire in this critical time in that country's history.

Mr. Chairman, I have served our country for 33 years in our diplomatic service. I currently serve as our Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Earlier in my career I served in Poland, Haiti, Turkey and Israel. Working in Poland during the challenging days before the fall of Communism and now in Congo during the difficult transition there to peace, democracy, and stability, I have been struck by the underlying desire of all people for those things we take for granted here in the United States: peace, respect for law, and economic opportunity. The role I

can play in promoting our interest in seeing a stable, peaceful, democratic Cote d'Ivoire is one I look forward to. If confirmed, it would be a great privilege to represent our country in Cote d'Ivoire.

Cote d'Ivoire now faces its most severe crisis since independence in 1960. With a recently authorized UN peacekeeping force of some 6,240 troops plus civilian components, the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire has drawn a deservedly strong response from the world community. Critical to the stability and prosperity of the entire West Africa region, Cote d'Ivoire is also home to significant non-oil American business interests. The United States has played and will play a key role in the continuing international effort to set Cote d'Ivoire back on track to stability.

Just as important is the health of Cote d'Ivoire's people. If confirmed, I look forward to engaging the Government of Cote d'Ivoire as part of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Cote d'Ivoire, with its very high infection rate of 9.7 percent (UNAIDS) is one of 12 African focus countries

in this Initiative. If confirmed, leading USG efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Cote d'Ivoire will be a top priority for me.

Even if all goes well, Cote d'Ivoire has years of recovery to overcome the trauma of the past five years. Free and fair presidential elections in 2005 will be an essential step towards true national reconciliation. Economic prosperity and political inclusion are vital if a stable, prosperous Cote d'Ivoire is to emerge. A strong and dynamic Cote d'Ivoire is important not just for Ivoirians, but also for the region as a whole and for the United States. Cote d'Ivoire has potential to again be a pillar of strength and prosperity in the region instead of a country in conflict.

If confirmed, I will work to promote the dual goals of a democratic, transparent political system and an economic program that helps reduce the poverty that fuels regional instability. I will press all parties to respect their commitments under the Linas-Marcoussis peace agreement and thereby address the

underlying causes of the conflict. I am aware that this will be difficult and we may need to consider what additional steps to take if the political forces of Cote d'Ivoire do not agree to put the political process back on track. Recent events in Cote d'Ivoire, notably the violence of March 25-27 in Abidjan, underscore the necessity of effectively addressing the culture of impunity that has grown since September 2002 if a stable and prosperous Cote d'Ivoire is to emerge from this conflict. I would make efforts to get all of the parties to address this issue one of my major immediate goals.

Mr. Chairman, for more than 30 years I have had the privilege of representing the government and people of the United States of America as a Foreign Service Officer. If confirmed, I believe my experiences serving in embassies overseas and in Washington have prepared me well to deal with the challenges I will face in Cote d'Ivoire.

Mr. Chairman, I want to underline how much importance I attach to guaranteeing the security of

all American citizens residing abroad. Security has always been a top priority for every ambassador and is even more so today. The events since September 11, 2001 underscore the resolve with which we must defend our citizens and our freedoms. If confirmed, I will do everything I can to ensure the safety and well being of American citizens in Cote d'Ivoire, working toward that goal with my Embassy and Department colleagues and with the support of Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for your abiding interest in America's relations with Africa and for holding this hearing. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other members of Congress to advance America's interests in Cote d'Ivoire.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.