

Statement of Charles A. Ray  
Ambassador-Designate to Zimbabwe  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

July 21, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a privilege and a great honor for me to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have demonstrated in me by putting my name forward for your consideration. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the administration, the Congress, and especially with this Committee, in advancing U.S. interests and our efforts to put Zimbabwe back on the path to democracy, stability and economic prosperity.

My professional and personal interest in the developing countries of the world spans nearly fifty years. In twenty years of military service with the United States Army, I had a chance to see firsthand the devastation that can be brought upon societies by war and instability. For the past twenty-seven years, as a Foreign Service Officer, I have served in a number of positions in the developing world, in Asia and Africa, and have seen the important role that America's engagement can have in lifting countries out of poverty and instability.

Zimbabwe once had a productive economy and effective democratic institutions. It was considered the breadbasket of southern Africa, with enviable schools and medical facilities. Today, unfortunately, Zimbabwe is struggling to overcome more than a decade of suffering under authoritarian misrule. While

some significant progress has been made by the transitional government in halting the devastating economic decline and implementing measures to restore fiscal integrity, hardliners from the previous regime that remain in Government continue to violate the human rights of the Zimbabwean people, and have refused to move forward with agreements on senior government appointments, media freedom, and other important reforms. The former Government instituted policies that have led to the collapse of what had been one of Africa's richest economies, caused massive food shortages, allowed more than 4,000 needless cholera deaths, and destroyed the institutions that form the basis for effective governance. As millions of Zimbabwe's beleaguered people have fled the turmoil of their homeland for neighboring countries, regional stability remains threatened.

If confirmed, I will continue our government's efforts to assist the people of Zimbabwe in their pursuit of a representative, democratically-elected government that respects human rights, adheres to the rule of law, and undertakes further economic reforms necessary to bring prosperity to Zimbabwe and contribute to growth and stability in the region.

In working to achieve Administration goals in this assignment, I will call upon my years of experience representing the United States and working to promote responsible government and respect for human rights in Asia and Africa. I have served as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, the first American Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone during that country's transition to elected civilian government. In these and other assignments, I have always sought to strengthen bilateral relations while at the same time advancing U.S. interests by encouraging democratic reforms and institution of rule of law. In Cambodia, I worked with the government and opposition groups to stem election violence and to enhance efforts to stop human

trafficking. In Vietnam, I aggressively supported American business interests, while pressing the government of Vietnam on human rights, religious freedom, and support for U.S. efforts to account for our servicemen missing since the Vietnam War. As DCM and Chargé in Freetown, I worked closely with the military junta and civilian political parties to facilitate the 1996 elections -- the first truly democratic elections in that country's history.

During the past three years, I have led our nation's effort to account for missing service members from past wars and to develop a whole of government approach to protecting our people who serve abroad and who are in danger of isolation or capture. In my approaches to foreign governments on these issues, I have consistently stressed the importance of human rights and rule of law. If confirmed, I would work diligently to strengthen pro-democracy forces and respect for rule of law in Zimbabwe.

The prospects for political transformation in Zimbabwe are immensely challenging, but we remain committed to facilitating peaceful change. U.S. assistance to Zimbabwe focuses on laying the groundwork for a return to democracy and prosperity by supporting democratic forces and civil society and by supporting life-saving assistance, including efforts to mitigate HIV/AIDS and other epidemics. This aid goes through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and contractors rather than to the central government, in order to ensure that it reaches the people who need it. We are mindful of existing legal restrictions on our assistance and will continue to consult closely with the Congress on any new or expanded assistance proposals.

If confirmed, I will continue the strong example of Ambassador McGee in speaking out about the state of human rights, lack of media freedom and rule of law, and the transitional government's slow pace of progress in these key areas. Robert Mugabe's assertions that Zimbabwe is "his" call into question his

commitment to democratic principles and reform. We will, however, continue to support those working for full implementation of the September 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA), on which the transitional government is based, and to seek ways to ease the suffering of the Zimbabwean people without aiding those forces who cling to power through repression and corruption. In this vein, our targeted sanctions on those individuals and entities that have hindered democracy in Zimbabwe will remain in place. Those targeted measures are a key motivator to elicit pro-reform, pro-democracy behavior on the part of Zimbabwean officials, Mugabe included.

The path to democracy, stability, and prosperity in Zimbabwe is long and it will be difficult. It involves beginning the process of drafting a new constitution, making significant progress on human rights -- including women's rights -- and the rule of law and rebuilding public sector infrastructure. In addition to a new constitution, reform of the electoral process and electoral institutions is essential to free and fair elections. The GPA calls for the completion of a new constitution by August 2010. Following a referendum on the constitution, internationally monitored elections should take place as soon as feasible to enable the people of Zimbabwe to freely select their President and other representatives. Parties to the GPA must perform these tasks in a timely manner. We are willing to work with the transitional government as much as possible, but we must insist on forward movement. Perhaps the most important challenge the government faces is the restoration of the people's faith in government. As I explained, it will not be easy, but we remain committed to the people of Zimbabwe and will continue to support them in their efforts to build better lives for themselves and their children.

The United States has not sanctioned the needy and deserving of Zimbabwe. We are on their side. Thus far in Fiscal Year 2009, U.S. humanitarian aid has surpassed \$160 million for emergency assistance, including food aid and food

security, refugee support, and health, water, sanitation, and hygiene programs. Our foreign assistance to Zimbabwe also focuses on laying the groundwork for a return to democracy and prosperity by supporting democratic forces and civil society. In Fiscal Year 2008, we provided more than \$186 million in humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe. All told, the United States continues to be the largest provider of food assistance to Zimbabwe, and Zimbabweans welcome the solidarity of the United States in their continuing time of need.

Zimbabwe is at a crossroads in its history. The decisions made by its leadership now will be felt far into the future. I welcome the opportunity to take on the challenges of this position. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to protect Americans and American interests, while at the same time, working to help the people of Zimbabwe restore their country to a free and prosperous member of the world community.

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