

Statement of Gayleatha Beatrice Brown
U.S. Ambassador-designate to Burkina Faso
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is an honor to appear before you today as nominee to become United States Ambassador to Burkina Faso. I appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary of State have shown in me by forwarding my name for your consideration. I wish to honor my parents, Mrs. Nellie H. Brown, here present, and the late David L. Brown, and to acknowledge the support of family members, mentors, teachers, pastors, friends, colleagues and the locally employed staff in U.S. Missions abroad, and a host of other “helping hands.” I am pleased that with me today are my brother Curtis H. Brown, friend Catherine Peaks White and her daughter, my godchild, Avetta Marie White.

Most of my 27-year Foreign Service career has been in African Affairs. If confirmed, I pledge to continue to work hard with the Country Team and Embassy personnel – American and Foreign Service nationals— to protect American citizens and to strengthen the growing partnership between the United States of America and Burkina Faso. If confirmed, I will work to achieve top U.S. policy priorities in Burkina Faso, including:

- Regional Stability;
- Democracy and Human Rights;
- Economic Prosperity and Security;
- Management and Organizational Excellence at the U.S. Mission in Ouagadougou; and
- Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

Thanks to the strong leadership of my predecessors and the Burkinabe government, relations between the United States and Burkina Faso are strong. If confirmed, I will build on that foundation and strengthen a partnership “grounded in mutual responsibility” – to quote President Barack Obama in Ghana on July 11, 2009 – for development that provides opportunity for more people, economic reform, human rights, good governance and regional stability. Burkina Faso’s path to multiparty democracy continues. Using a variety of diplomatic tools, we encourage the strengthening of democratic processes in advance of Burkina’s 2010

and 2011 elections. If confirmed, I will seek to support the strengthening of democratic institutions in Burkina Faso, particularly the National Assembly and regional and local government. A fledgling democracy, Burkina Faso faces great challenges posed by poverty, disease, low rainfall, low agricultural productivity in a single cash crop and subsistence economy based on limited productive land, and low literacy rates – particularly for girls, many of whom do not even attend school.

Our assistance programs seek to assist in and include:

-- Millennium Challenge Account Compact: The Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) five-year \$480.9 million compact seeks to reduce poverty in Burkina Faso through economic growth by making strategic investments in roads, improved agricultural productivity, land use rights and land management, and primary education with a particular focus on girls.

-- USAID: USAID closed its mission in 1995 but since 2004 has implemented a PL 480 non-emergency assistance program that focuses on agricultural productivity and maternal and child health. It also implements the girls' education component of MCC's program in Burkina Faso; provided \$250,000 in PEPFAR funding in FY 2008 to support an HIV/AIDS workplace project implemented by the US Department of Labor; and supported several regionally-supported projects. In late 2009, USAID will mount a malaria control project to support the Government of Burkina Faso's national malaria strategy. By 2011, annual USAID programming should reach the level of \$20 million. To support this increased funding, USAID has recently opened an office at the Embassy in Ouagadougou, and I support a proposal to reopen a full-fledged USAID mission.

-- Department of Defense (DOD): There is strong military cooperation between the United States and Burkina Faso. A new Security Cooperation Programs Officer (SCPO) position at the Embassy promotes and implements DOD Security Cooperation Programs, serves as the de-facto representative of the U.S. Africa Command and works closely with the Embassy Political/Military Officer. Both officers coordinate with the Burkinabe Director of Military Cooperation on various training programs including: International Military Education and Training (IMET), DOD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP), the Joint/Combined Exchange Training (JCET), and Military-to-Military (M2M) Exchange. We also have a close cooperation with Burkina Faso in the field of military aviation.

If confirmed, I will work to strengthen Burkina Faso's capacity to continue its support for regional peacekeeping and counter-terrorism efforts. Since 1993,

Burkina Faso has contributed more than 2,250 peacekeeping troops under the aegis of the African Union (AU) or UN. Missions include: Togo, Niger, Comoros Islands, Darfur, Haiti, Zaire, Burundi, Liberia, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo. Trained under the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, advanced elements of Burkina Faso's Laafi Battalion are scheduled to be deployed to Darfur under UNAMID leadership in August 2009.

-- Peace Corps: Currently, 104 volunteers work in Burkina Faso with communities to improve rates of school enrollment and retention for girls, support small business development and provide HIV/AIDS education. Burkina Faso has successfully reduced and stabilized its HIV prevalence rate. In 2009, UN-AIDS estimated that 1.6% of the population is HIV positive, down from 7.1% in 1997.

Burkina Faso is addressing areas of continuing concern with human rights implications, notably trafficking in persons (TIP). A country of origin, transit and destination for trafficked persons, mostly children, for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation, Burkina Faso is making a good faith, significant effort to comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Burkina Faso's National Assembly adopted new anti-TIP legislation in May 2008, which punishes trafficking for sexual, labor and other related practices with maximum prison terms of ten years and allows terms as high as 20 years or life imprisonment under certain conditions. If confirmed, I will work with the Burkinabe to continue to combat trafficking in persons.

If confirmed, I also will work to improve the situation of women, who comprise 45% of the workforce. In general, women occupy a subordinate position and experience significant discrimination in such areas as education, jobs, property, access to health care and family rights. The Government has attempted to change attitudes toward women, using education via the media and laws which prohibit forced marriage and provide equal property rights for women and some inheritance benefits. If confirmed, I will urge the Burkinabe government to adopt a specific law that protects women from domestic violence and to rigorously enforce its legislation against abuse of women.

If confirmed, I will seek to promote bilateral trade and commerce between the United States and Burkina Faso, encouraging public-private partnerships. For that reason, I was gratified to learn of a Burkinabe November 2007 law that provides for criminal penalties for official corruption and created the Superior Authority of State Control (ASCE), an entity under the prime minister's authority,

which donors welcomed. The Government of Burkina Faso has made the fight against corruption and to improve good governance a hallmark of this administration. I intend to support its efforts.

I will work to leverage our efforts with those of other donors, notably the international financial institutions. For example, the IMF and World Bank work in tandem to support Burkina's transition to a market economy and reduce poverty. The IMF aims to consolidate macroeconomic stability and establish conditions conducive to sustained economic growth and poverty reduction, including improving the investment climate, capacity building for small and medium enterprises, technical assistance to medium-sized enterprises in selected sectors (agriculture, construction, transport), and proactive support for project development in the financial, hospitality, infrastructure and mining sectors.

The World Bank has supported the pillars of the national poverty reduction strategy with analytic work, technical advice, on-going operations in the areas of education, sustained land management and natural capital, and new financing. Its sharper focus on private sector development has resulted in considerable progress in doing business indicators (Burkina jumped from the 164th rank in 2008 to the 148th rank in the overall ratings of the 2009 Doing Business Report).

If confirmed, I will work to continue my track record as sitting Ambassador to the Republic of Benin of active public diplomacy outreach to promote mutual understanding, including with the Muslim community (more than half of Burkina Faso's population). Ultimately, I hope to conduct these efforts from the new embassy complex (NEC) that is expected to be ready for occupation in January 2010.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to address you. If confirmed, I look forward to representing the interests of the Government of the United States of America and the American people in Burkina Faso.

I look forward to your questions.