

Statement of James Swan
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Djibouti
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 23, 2008

Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson, Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee for Chief of Mission Djibouti. Thank you for convening this hearing so quickly during a very busy season of Senate business and campaign preparations. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary of State have shown by nominating me to this position, and particularly for the support of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer in this appointment.

First, Mr. Chairman, let me mention several family members and colleagues who are here today. My wife, Daphne Michelle Titus is here, and I would also like to mention our children, Garner and Mitchell, who are not present in this room but are with us in spirit. Daphne is also a Foreign Service Officer with extensive experience in Africa. We have been full partners not just in the home, but also as we've worked in Embassies abroad and in public service here in Washington. Let me also add that I am honored to appear before you on this panel with my two friends and colleagues, Ambassadors Eastham and Symington.

Mr. Chairman, during more than twenty years at the State Department, I have devoted my career to the challenges of developing countries in transition, many involving unsettled security environments and complex political reforms. My overseas assignments have included service as Political Officer in Cameroon during its first multi-party Presidential elections, as "Somalia Watcher" in Nairobi during the final pull-out of UN forces in the mid 1990s, and as Deputy Chief of Mission in both the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo during efforts to bring an end to conflicts and humanitarian crises in those countries and to promote democratic reforms. In Washington I have served as Director for African Analysis in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and most recently as Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs with broad policy and program responsibility for Central and East Africa, including the Horn of Africa and Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading Embassy Djibouti's dedicated team in advancing the interests of the United States. This team of over 200 consists of Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel, military staff assigned to the Embassy, and of course our invaluable Foreign Service National employees. Our interests in Djibouti are primarily in the areas of peace and security, good governance, and economic development.

Peace and Security

Djibouti is a small but important country on the Horn of Africa. It occupies a strategic position at the Bab el Mandab Strait, which joins the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. These waters are used by some 40 percent of the world's commercial ships. Djibouti hosts the only U.S. military base in sub-Saharan Africa, Camp Lemonier, headquarters for the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and its approximately 2,200 personnel. Djibouti has long been a pocket of stability in a turbulent region, and is an important partner in the fight against terrorism. It borders Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia/Somaliland, and faces Yemen less than 18 miles across the strait to the east. Djibouti has often used its close relations with all of its neighbors to promote peace and understanding in the region. It is the regional headquarters for the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. In June, Djibouti hosted an important meeting between Somalia's Transitional Federal Government and the opposition Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, which led to an agreement that both sides have now initialed. If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I will continue to build our close relationship with the Government of Djibouti on regional peace and security issues.

In view of the large and important CJTF-HOA presence, let me underscore my commitment, if confirmed, to continue close coordination and cooperation between Embassy personnel and the CJTF-HOA contingent. If confirmed, I will also ensure that all CJTF-HOA programming in Djibouti fits within overarching U.S. government priorities to advance our key interests in the country.

Democracy and Governance

Djibouti is a nascent democracy. It has been independent only since 1977 and faced a limited but persistent internal rebel movement in the early 1990s. With the negotiated conclusion of the rebellion, a "grand coalition" was formed that effectively rules the country. Presidential elections in 2005 were determined by international observers to be free and fair. Recent parliamentary elections in February returned all of the seats to members of the ruling coalition. At the regional level, however, other political groups obtained greater representation. We have been encouraged by the results achieved by active U.S. engagement on governance and human rights issues – for example on Trafficking in Persons. Djibouti's rapid passage of a new anti-trafficking law and follow-up implementation were reflected in an improvement in Djibouti's Trafficking in Persons ranking from Tier II Watch List to Tier II. If confirmed, I will work with our Djiboutian partners to continue their democracy/governance reforms – including to enlarge space for private media and civil society groups that at times have faced constraints.

Economic Development

On the economic front, Mr. Chairman, Djibouti's leadership is seeking to embrace the opportunities of globalization. Capitalizing on its location and excellent deep-water port, Djibouti has privatized its port and airport and has embarked on construction of a new port facility that will dramatically increase capacity. This privatization has reduced

corruption and increased revenues flowing to the government. Djibouti is also emerging as a regional banking center, albeit on a modest scale. Making Djibouti an attractive place for investment and a center for regional and international trade will be critical to its economic development. Djibouti remains very poor, ranked 149 out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index. Nearly ninety percent of Djiboutian land is desert. The United States has a small but active AID mission in Djibouti, focused on health and education, particularly to combat low life-expectancy, maternal and under-five child mortality, and transmission of infectious diseases. The United States also responds to the current region-wide problem of food insecurity through support for the Famine Early Warning Network office in Djibouti, as well as Food for Peace and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance programs. If confirmed, I will continue to make support for economic development in Djibouti a priority.

Eritrea/Djibouti Border

Mr. Chairman, as you can see, we have important interests in Djibouti. Djibouti's role in regional peace and security, its democratic and governance reforms, and its economic prospects merit support and encouragement from friends of Djibouti. Yet, one of its neighbors – Eritrea – has instead sought to foment instability, creating a potential new border conflict where before none existed. The establishment of Eritrean military positions just over the Ras Doumeira ridge on the Djiboutian side of the border represents a worrying threat to Djibouti. The Eritrean government has rebuffed efforts by the African Union, League of Arab States, and bilateral partners of the two countries to negotiate resolution. Now the United Nations Secretariat, at the behest of the Security Council, is sending a team to gather further details of the border stand-off and report back to the Council. In view of Eritrea's destabilizing role elsewhere in the region, this move against Djibouti can only be seen as yet another deliberate threat by this dangerous spoiler on the Horn. If confirmed, I will give my full support to international efforts to resolve this incipient conflict peacefully and restore the border to the status quo ante.

American Community

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my first, most immediate priority will be the safety and well-being of Americans living in or visiting Djibouti. With only a few hundred private Americans in-country, I would expect, if confirmed, to remain in frequent contact with them, most importantly on consular and security issues, but also to benefit from the wisdom of long-time residents, aid workers, and others with expertise on developments in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the honor to appear before the Committee today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.