

Mr. John Simon
Ambassador-nominee to the African Union
Statement Prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today in consideration of my nomination to serve as the United States Ambassador to the African Union. I want to thank President Bush and Secretary Rice for the confidence and trust they have shown in nominating me for this position.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to acknowledge the members of my family who are here with me today: first, my wife Laura and my daughter Maya. My two sons, Will and Leo, and my other daughter Jayne could not be here today. I would also like to thank my parents, Barry and Hinda Simon for their generous and unfailing love and support. Without my family's love and sacrifice, my career in public service would not have been possible.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I have spent the past six years working on global development issues. The primary focus of this work has been in Africa. Over that time, I have had the extraordinary honor and privilege to serve our country as an official at the U.S. Agency for International Development; as Senior Director for Relief, Stabilization, and Development on the staff of the National Security Council; and, most recently, as Executive Vice President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. In these capacities, I have helped to support the President's international development agenda at a time of dynamic economic and political change around the globe.

Nowhere has this change been more profound than in Africa. Thanks to improved governance, balanced fiscal and monetary policies, and investments in health and education, Africa as a whole is experiencing its most significant economic expansion since independence, with ten years of uninterrupted growth, the last five at rates in excess of 5%. Africans have also experienced a growth in freedom and democracy, with more countries classified as free by the non-governmental organization Freedom House than at any time in the continent's history.

The United States has been an active partner in helping Africans along this journey. Through the groundbreaking Millennium Challenge Account, with

firm bipartisan backing from Congress we have supported the rule of law, sound economic policies, and investments in people. Through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the President's Malaria Initiative, Americans have helped Africans make unprecedented strides against two of the most deadly diseases on Earth. Through the Africa Education Initiative and the Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative, the United States has worked to educate and empower Africans from all strata of society. And through the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, the African Mortgage Market Initiative, and the African Financial Sector Initiative, we have helped to lift the staggering burden of debt and develop the institutions of a modern economy. I have been honored to have played a role in every one of these efforts. If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I will work with the African Union (AU) to highlight these initiatives as important developmental issues for the AU to pursue.

The African Union is the most prominent manifestation of the new era on the Continent. Founded in July 2002, the African Union heralded a change from its predecessor's focus on "non-interference" to one, in the words of its first Chairman, Alpha Oumar Konare, of "non-indifference." This was a highly significant change and a recognition that Africa not only can, but *must* take charge of its own destiny if it is to compete and prosper in the 21st Century. The creation and success of the African Union is not only critical to the Continent, but to the international community and to the interests of the United States.

The African Union is an active, multilateral organization orchestrating complementary agendas for change and development. The Permanent Representatives of its 53 member states are setting political directions in areas as disparate as election monitoring and climate change. The African Union Commission, effectively the AU's Executive Secretariat, is implementing the policies endorsed by the AU's Assembly of Heads of State. Over the last 18 months, the breadth of AU political initiatives has dramatically expanded, and it has registered some significant successes, including stabilizing Comoros and Burundi, establishing the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit, and adopting the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance.

Although making significant progress, the African Union still faces considerable challenges. Capacity gaps, understaffing, and regional conflict, such as in Zimbabwe, Somalia, and Sudan, all threaten the nascent strides

the African Union has made. These challenges on the one hand, and the increasing vitality of the AU on the other, provide the United States with a unique opportunity to engage the AU, which is looking to the United States for support.

For instance, given the recent elections in Zimbabwe, and others that have suffered from serious irregularities, it is imperative that the United States and other donor partners assist the African Union to develop institutions to ensure that the standards enshrined in the AU charter function to guarantee free and fair elections are respected throughout the Continent. Despite its shortcomings, the AU sent an observer mission to the June 27 Zimbabwean run-off, and that mission concluded that the election had fallen short of AU standards. The June 30-July 2 AU summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt issued a statement stating that they were deeply concerned with the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe and called for negotiations between parties and recognition that some form of transitional government would be necessary.

Building upon our historic ties, shared culture, and deep appreciation of the African continent's strategic significance, the United States, in August 2006, became the first observer country to establish a separate diplomatic mission accredited to the AU. USAU was established in 2006 with the intention to forge a strategic partnership between the United States and the African Union by building the AU's capacity to strengthen democratic institutions, promote peace and stability, improve the lives and health of all Africans, and support sustainable economic development through increased trade and investment. If confirmed, I will strive to forward this agenda. I will also use every opportunity to press the AU to live up to its own standard of "non-indifference," especially in promoting human rights and democracy.

I would look forward, if confirmed as the U.S. Representative to the AU, to working closely with you and other Members of Congress to ensure that U.S. interests, policies, and assistance to the African Union achieves maximum impact.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling this hearing. I would be pleased to answer any questions you and the Members of the Committee may have.