

STATEMENT OF MARCIA STEPHENS BLOOM BERNICAT
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL AND TO THE
REPUBLIC OF GUINEA-BISSAU
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I wish to thank the President and the Secretary of State for the trust and confidence that they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce my sons Sunil Christopher and Sumit Nicolaus, with whom I have been enormously blessed to share the adventure and the challenge of service overseas. It has been my fortune as well to have represented the American people in seven countries in five geographic regions since joining the Foreign Service in 1981. If confirmed, it would be a great privilege to serve our country in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Both countries are friends of the United States.

The Senegalese people are well known for their proud democratic tradition, including peaceful transitions of government, religious tolerance, a free press, and an acknowledgement of the importance of the rule of law, even as they struggle to overcome persistent economic and governance difficulties posed by the challenges of development. Senegal continues to participate actively in international organizations and including the Organization of the Islamic Conference in which President Abdoulaye Wade will chair for the next three years. President Wade remains a dynamic African leader, as evidenced most recently by his key role in brokering an agreement between Chad and Sudan to

work toward reducing tensions in their volatile region. He has also been a leading proponent of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Senegal is a strong partner in the War on Terror and President Wade has provided vital personal leadership in promoting religious tolerance and mutual understanding.

Having had the privilege of working with our earlier peacekeeping training programs in sub-Saharan Africa, I look forward, if confirmed, to supporting Senegal in its role as a leading contributor to United Nations and other peacekeeping operations around the world, including in Darfur.

Senegal conducted presidential and legislative elections in 2007, but the parliamentary elections were boycotted by the opposition and local polling has been deferred until 2009. If confirmed, one of my most important responsibilities will be to work with President Wade and his government to ensure an environment that encourages the broadest participation in the political process by all elements of the population. In addition, it will be important to promote governance, transparency and accountability in government spending.

To achieve momentum in its development, Senegal will need to exert maximum effort to make the critical market-based reforms that underpin the solid economic foundation of any dynamic society. The U.S. will continue to work closely with Senegal on these reforms. After a series of false starts, Senegal is working to secure a Millennium Challenge Compact.

The United States is intensely engaged with Senegal to reduce the incidence of malaria and to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Thankfully, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Senegal is relatively low, but this pandemic knows no borders. As someone who has lost too many friends, colleagues, and counterparts in the last decade to these two preventable diseases, if confirmed, I will work to redouble our efforts in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria, and address other health issues.

Guinea-Bissau continues to face formidable challenges to establish political stability and economic prosperity. Although its democratic institutions and rule of law remain weak, the country has reached the important milestone of seating a government that conforms to the demands of its constitution. The upcoming parliamentary elections could be a harbinger of the direction that political development will take there.

If confirmed, I am eager to apply the lessons learned from our Country Team efforts in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean to fight the contagion of illicit narcotics trafficking that afflicts Guinea-Bissau at worrisome levels. I relish the prospect of developing a successful inter-agency strategy, which would also engage international partners, to combat this scourge and to provide the people of Guinea-Bissau with material and moral support in this effort. I will also work, if confirmed, to promote the dual goals of a democratic, transparent political system and a complementary economic program to help reduce the levels of poverty that contribute to regional instability. I am aware of how difficult these challenges will be.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your continuing interest in Africa and the positive role the United States can play in its development. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you, your Committee and other members of Congress to advance America's interests in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, and throughout the region. It would be an honor to travel the length and breadth of both countries to proudly represent the people of the United States of America.

I would be happy to answer your questions.