

Statement by Pamela J. H. Slutz
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Burundi
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 21, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored that President Obama has nominated me to serve as Ambassador to Burundi. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to live up to the trust the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me.

I have served in Central Africa before, in one of Burundi's most important – and troubled – neighbors. My first overseas assignment with the Foreign Service was to Kinshasa – capital of the former “Zaire” and now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Very soon, I will complete a three-year tour of duty as Deputy Chief of Mission in Nairobi, Kenya, the largest U.S. mission in sub-Saharan Africa and a regional center. From this vantage point, I have become familiar with Burundi's courageous role in regional peacekeeping as part of the Africa Union's Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and its committed participation in regional bodies such as the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the U.S.-facilitated Tripartite Plus Commission.

Burundi, a friend of the United States, is also one of the world's poorest countries and a fragile democracy. The legacy of its decade-long ethnic-based civil conflict continues to be felt and poses daunting economic and political challenges for the future. The process of demobilization and integration of the FNL (National Forces for Liberation) is delicate. Endemic corruption, an unschooled populace, lack of medical resources, and the specter of waves of returning refugees prove intimidating to the goal of democratic consolidation. Presidential elections are scheduled for 2010, in which current President Pierre Nkurunziza of the ruling CNDD-FDD party will be challenged by numerous opposition parties.

Despite challenges, the significant progress the peace process is making in Burundi is encouraging. The Government and the FNL appear committed to an inclusive process to implement their ceasefire and integration agreements. If

confirmed, I will support the continued South African-led efforts and those of the newly established Partnership for Peace in Burundi (PPB) to usher in implementation of the peace agreement.

If confirmed, I also will continue the work of my predecessor for full implementation of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of thousands of FNL combatants into the government and society.

These developments will help pave the way for durable peace and stability for all Burundians and for the holding of free, fair, and transparent elections in 2010.

Through the African Contingency Operations and Training Program, ACOTA, the United States bolsters Burundi's capacity as a troop contributor to multinational peacekeeping operations. If confirmed, I will continue our work with other donor partners and neighboring countries to promote regional – and domestic – security by helping Burundian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) return, resettle, and reintegrate. I also will continue to work with UNHCR and others to support programs to help resolve resulting land disputes fairly.

Through broadly focused development assistance, the United States promotes better health, particularly maternal and child care; assist female former child soldiers, fight corruption, and support microenterprise initiatives. We are concerned about gender-based violence in Burundi and we strongly support the efforts of UNICEF and the UN Integrated Bureau in Burundi (BINUB) to monitor cases and seek justice to end impunity. We will work with the government and civil society to address the root causes of pervasive corruption.

Since the first meeting of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in Bujumbura in September 2004, the United States has supported this joint African Union-United Nations effort to promote peace and security, governance and democracy, economic development, and regional integration. If confirmed, I will support this process. Through the U.S.-facilitated Tripartite Plus Commission, we will also promote democracy in Burundi by collaborating with neighboring governments to reduce the threat from the negative and destabilizing impact of non-state armed forces, particularly those in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

America's relationship with Burundi has been historically constructive, based on trust, shared values and interests. If confirmed, I would build on that solid base, and I look forward to working with you and your Committee on these and other issues of interest and common concern.

The diligence and determination of previous U.S. ambassadors to Burundi have set a high standard. If confirmed, I promise to carry forward the mandate to successfully represent American values and to pursue American interests in Burundi.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you. I will be happy to take your questions.

