

Statement by W. Stuart Symington  
United States Ambassador-Designate to Rwanda  
Before Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
July 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to be Ambassador to Rwanda. I am deeply grateful to the President and to Secretary Rice for this honor. I also want to thank you Senators for the kind introduction. One of the many things the United States and Rwanda have in common is the prominent role of women in public life. I know of no better American examples of that success.

Before I turn to my prepared statement, may I introduce the members of my family who are here with me today? First, my wife Susan and children Janey and Stuart – they are the real diplomats in our family and they have served America as true ambassadors at every stage of what has truly been “our career.”

May I also point out that I am pleased to be joined by my Uncle, former Congressman Jim Symington, and my brother Doctor John Symington; I thank them as well as those friends and colleagues who have joined us here today. Finally, I'd like to thank Chairman Ike Skelton, for the inspiring challenge he put to me years ago. He said that our greatest strengths as a nation were our people and our principles, and that one of our greatest challenges was to act jointly, with a common purpose, across agency and service lines, to achieve our national objectives. If confirmed, that is what I will seek to do in Rwanda.

Mr. Chairman, the people of Rwanda have a remarkable opportunity today to show that it is possible for a people to forge a common future in a land that was consumed by the horror of genocide just 14 years ago. It is vital that they succeed. The Rwandans (and the rest of the world) must ensure that the genocide is never forgotten and that it will never be repeated.

Rwandans know that the best way to honor the genocide victims is to look forward and unite, after looking back to remember the terrible cost of division and hatred. Rwandans recognize today that they must work

together to realize their promising future. Over the last decade, they have improved education and health care; they have advanced reconciliation and made progress meting out justice. They have countered security threats and cared for genocide victims. They have created economic growth and improved the investment climate. They have achieved noteworthy progress, but they still face enormous challenges.

As the government and many Rwandans view their future, their call is for all Rwandans to see themselves as one people, with equal justice and opportunity under law. Their call is also a test. Rwanda faces the test of countering extremists, while vigorously protecting human rights; of improving governance and transparency; of strengthening democratic institutions, while delivering basic services; and of attracting investment, while promoting job and income growth. To create a shared sense of national identity and a positive climate for development requires instilling widespread faith in the fairness of governing institutions as well as permitting free access to information and to the work of a free, responsible and independent press. Progress meeting this test is particularly important in the run-up to the September House of Delegates elections and to the 2011 presidential elections.

If confirmed, I will work with all Rwandans to help them strengthen their democratic institutions and their economy in an unstable region and to advance transparency and respect for human rights.

We have a strong bilateral partnership with Rwanda, reflected in President Bush's visit there in February this year. Mr. Chairman, if I am confirmed, my goal will be to advance America's interests by synchronizing the efforts of all U.S. government agencies and personnel working in Rwanda. We will also enlist the help of the American private sector and non-governmental groups, working with Rwandans to achieve our shared goals. We will focus on fighting disease and hunger, promoting democratic prosperity and growth, facilitating national reconciliation, and advancing regional stability and global security.

Rwanda's commitment to regional stability is reflected in its role as a member of the U.S.-led Tripartite Plus peace process. Rwanda has been a constructive partner in those efforts to develop and implement a joint approach to increasing security in the Great Lakes region. The United States will continue to play a leading role promoting good relations between

Rwanda and its neighbors. If confirmed, I will work in concert with my U.S. colleagues in the neighboring countries to support together ongoing efforts to bring an end to the threat of armed groups in the region and to secure the safe and voluntary return of refugees. This remains essential, if the people of the Great Lakes are to live in peace and to train their sights on generating growth instead of resolving conflict.

No country on the Globe has a greater reason to stop genocide than Rwanda. It is no surprise that Rwandan troops are the backbone of the African Union and United Nations' peacekeeping force in Darfur. Just last week, that Rwandan force suffered five casualties while successfully repelling a large-scale attack in Darfur. Today, some 2,500 Rwandan peacekeepers are on the front-line against genocide in Darfur.

At home, Rwandans recognize that their lasting security depends on generating economic growth and creating jobs. Rising prosperity will help to underpin reconciliation and may aid efforts to ensure equal treatment under law, and political transparency. Today, Rwandans see significant economic progress. Those gains are particularly remarkable given the devastating losses from the genocide. While most Rwandans continue to live in poverty, the government has embarked on an ambitious plan to improve the standard of living through higher education and infrastructure development. If confirmed, I plan to seek ways to contribute to that effort, especially by encouraging opportunities for private sector investment and job training to prepare Rwandans for new jobs. Rwanda is opening its business environment. The Trade Investment Framework Agreement helped propel a 32% increase of U.S.-Rwanda trade in 2007, and the Bilateral Investment Treaty signed by President Bush and President Kagame in February will help attract new U.S. investment. Our extensive program to construct coffee washing stations has been a singular success, with Starbucks and other major coffee chains clamoring for Rwanda's world-class specialty coffee.

Increased prosperity will help Rwandans focus on working together to shape a better, united future, but the cleavages caused by genocide will take years to heal. Rwanda has a national policy favoring reconciliation and de-emphasizing ethnic identification, but this will be the work of generations. Therefore, ongoing efforts to promote reconciliation are essential, both at the grassroots and in the capital. On the national level, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), may play a central role. The newly

approved \$24.73 MCC Threshold Country Plan will fund justice sector initiatives designed to strengthen democratic governance and the capacity of civil society organizations. At the grassroots level, the Peace Corps is sure to have a very positive impact. The first volunteers are slated to arrive in Rwanda this year.

In Rwanda, investments of development resources have been shown to have great impact due to the Government of Rwanda's focused leadership. As a priority country for PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief) and PMI (President's Malaria Initiative), the United States has been in the forefront of combating HIV/AIDS and malaria pandemic in Rwanda. Through our USAID Mission we also fund programs in democracy and governance, economic growth, food security, and healthcare.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is making a difference in Rwanda and Rwanda has, and will, make a difference in the world. If confirmed, I will work to build on that success. I am convinced that Rwanda's democratic development, economic growth, and security are essential for its citizens and critical to the stability of much of Africa. I look forward to working closely with you, Mr. Chairman, and with the committee in this most important endeavor.

Thank you again Chairman Feingold, Senator Isakson and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions that you might have.