

**Statement of Laurence D. Wohlers
Ambassador-Designate to the Central African Republic
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 13, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States to the Central African Republic. I thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for entrusting me with this important responsibility. If confirmed, I will work with the Committee and others in Congress to advance the interests of the United States in the Central African Republic.

Joining me here today are my wife Ann, who for 30 years has been my partner in a Foreign Service career that has taken us from Africa to Asia to Europe, and two of our three children, Christopher and Sophie.

Ann and I are pleased that, if confirmed, this assignment would be a return trip for us. I served in Bangui twenty five years ago, and we remember those days fondly. The people of the Central African Republic are warm and hospitable, and are enthusiastic friends of the United States.

The ensuing years have not been kind to the CAR, however. Democratic elections led neither to political stability nor significant economic development. Internal conflicts between government forces and rebels, banditry and cross-border incursions, as well as reported human rights abuses by all sides, have made large regions insecure. Most recently, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), has destabilized eastern CAR.

Sadly, living standards have dramatically declined since I was last there. Chronic insecurity has devastated health and education. Over 300,000 Central Africans are refugees or IDPs. Rates for HIV/AIDs, mother-child mortality and malaria are among the highest on the continent. Although a country historically blessed with land and water for all, chronic malnutrition is widespread. Given this picture, it is not surprising that most U.S. assistance is humanitarian. In fact, we are the largest provider of food assistance to the UN World Food Program in CAR.

Nevertheless, establishing security, stability and good governance are essential to the country's future. In that regard, we are working closely with the government, the UN Integrated Peace-building Office (BINUCA), and other donor nations. We also continue to support the operations of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) which, with active Central African cooperation, is pursuing the LRA in eastern CAR.

A key objective this year is to support a credible electoral process leading to presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2010. This is essential to building on the Inclusive Political Dialogue and sustaining momentum in the program to disarm and reintegrate militias.

Despite the hardships the Central African people have endured, I remain optimistic that, with political dialogue and improved governance, Central Africans can create a brighter future for themselves. Although the American presence is small, should I be confirmed, I will strive to ensure that we use our resources to maximum effect, while ensuring the safety and security of both the embassy staff and larger American community.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I welcome any questions you may have.