

Dennis B. Hankins
U.S. Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Guinea
Before
the Committee on Foreign Relations
U.S. Senate
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea. I want to recognize my wife Mira who is here today. She has been at my side through my thirty-one years in the Foreign Service, and I credit her for providing support for any success I may have had. My son, Danu, cannot be here today due to his service commitments in the United States Navy.

It has been my honor to serve in sixteen assignments during my Foreign Service career with six of those assignments – spanning fourteen years – focused on Africa. Many of my assignments have been in countries in the midst of, or emerging from, crisis. Despite the challenges of these postings, I have relished the opportunities to engage in diplomacy that can dramatically affect a country's future and advance American interests.

My experience in a number of young African democracies tells me that the transition from dictatorship to an open society requires constant sustained attention and commitment by national leaders and all segments of society. Guineans have made it clear that they want to see the United States working hand in hand with all

three branches of the Guinean government to reinforce Guinea's democratic architecture. Our work to strengthen media freedoms and civil society is just as important. As part of our work with the executive branch, we continue to work with Guinea's security apparatus – the military and police – to strengthen its professionalism and bring it firmly under elected civilian authority. Finally, we must sustain our efforts to reduce poverty and disease in Guinea, including by strengthening the health system. Responsible management of Guinea's mineral wealth is key to Guinea's long term poverty reduction efforts. The challenges are many and will only be overcome through true Guinean commitment, but we need to support those who wish to help their country.

The Republic of Guinea achieved a landmark election in 2010, its first free and fair democratic presidential election. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure U.S. support for Guinea's nascent democracy continues in a meaningful and impactful way. Guinea will hold its second presidential elections in eleven days. If confirmed, my priority will be to work the newly elected administration and opposition parties in building an inclusive and constructive political dialogue. Looking toward the new year, my focus will shift to local elections. These upcoming elections provide Guinea with a concrete opportunity to further deepen its transition to democracy.

In the midst of presidential elections, Guinea continues to battle the Ebola outbreak. If confirmed, I will remain fully committed to helping Guinea “get to zero” in its fight against Ebola. The persistent transmission of Ebola over the past 18 months highlights the fragility of primary health care facilities in the country and deep-rooted public health challenges. The United States continues to provide significant technical assistance to Guinea on restoring and improving the health care system as well as ending the Ebola epidemic. I look forward to supporting the efforts of USAID and CDC in Guinea.

In the long term, if confirmed, I will encourage the Guinean government to remain a constructive regional and international actor, and will work with the government and all segments of society to foster better political and economic decision-making at home. In the Republic of Guinea, we have a willing partner on regional and international issues, yet the government’s capacity is limited. If confirmed, I will work with the Guinean government to further strengthen its approach to regional crises. I will also work to strengthen cooperation on counter-narcotics issues, as well as other forms of transnational crimes, such as trafficking in persons and money laundering. I will make the safety and welfare of my staff and all U.S. citizens my highest priority and seek out commercial opportunities for U.S. companies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Guinea. I am happy to answer any questions.