

Statement of Larry Edward André
U.S. Ambassador-Designate to Mauritania
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
December 17, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to come before you as President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for their confidence in me.

I am supported here today by my daughter, Ruhiyyih André and my friends and colleagues from the State Department's Africa Bureau and the Office of the Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan. My wife, Salma Rahman, is serving at our embassy in Cote d'Ivoire, and so cannot be here today. I am thankful for the support I have received from my family, friends and colleagues.

Mauritania is a strong partner of the United States in Northwest Africa. We support efforts of the Mauritanian government, political parties and civil society to strengthen democratic institutions, to end slavery and to build a secure, united, and increasingly prosperous society that celebrates the cultural diversity of this starkly beautiful land. The Mauritanian people are menaced by violent regional extremist groups, like al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb. We support Mauritania's security forces in confronting this threat. Mauritania supports its neighbor, Mali, as that country renews its democracy while confronting this same dire threat to regional security. Mauritania hosts more than 66,000 refugees from Mali. Since Fiscal Year 2012, the United States has provided nearly \$31 million in humanitarian assistance to Mauritania to address food insecurity and the needs of Malian refugees.

Mauritania held the first round of legislative and municipal elections last month. The second round is scheduled for this Saturday. Presidential elections should take place in 2014. Mauritians are distancing their nation from a history of autocratic governance. We know that democratic governance, resting on a foundation of citizens' rights and integrity in the management of public resources, is the surest way to achieve social and economic advancement. Representative, honest governance is both the best response to violent extremists who seek to

reverse Mauritania's recent gains and an effective means to strengthen Mauritania's national unity.

Like many other multi-ethnic countries, including our own, Mauritania has struggled to achieve a national identity that fully reflects its cultural diversity. The mix of Arab, Berber, Halpulaar, Soninké and Wolof cultures gives Mauritanian society a special richness and ties to its neighbors to the North, East and South. During my first visit in 1984, I was highly impressed by the Mauritanian people's generous hospitality, entrepreneurial spirit and love for poetry and theological discussion. Mauritians of all ethnic communities share a deep reverence for their faith. Their tradition of pious, spiritual and scholarly Islam is respected throughout the Muslim world.

My career in Africa began thirty years ago as a Peace Corps Volunteer, fresh out of college, living in a small village in West Africa. I greatly cherish all I learned from my village friends and host family. As a diplomat since 1990, among several other assignments in Africa, I served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Sierra Leone and Tanzania. In Sierra Leone, at the end of a brutal conflict, our Embassy played a vital role in the launch of a remarkable recovery. In Tanzania, our partnership broadened and deepened dramatically, contributing to Tanzania's development while producing new opportunities for American business. As Director of the Office of the Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan over the past two years, I greatly admired the determination of Sudanese and South Sudanese citizens, and of our colleagues at the two U.S. Missions, to build a better future in a region long suffering from conflict and injustice.

Mauritania has accomplished notable economic growth in recent years. If confirmed, I will work to expand our growing commercial relations, working closely with American business. I feel deeply the responsibility of a Chief of Mission for the welfare of all resident Americans and of all U.S. Government employees. I also feel deeply the responsibility of a representative of the American people to apply our country's influence to the promotion of peace and human rights.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will look to you for counsel and support as I seek to build on the achievements of Ambassador Jo Ellen Powell and her team in advancing an American-Mauritanian partnership based on shared values and shared interests. I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you very much for your kind consideration of my nomination.