

Statement by Dawn M. Liberi  
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Burundi  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
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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 the Republic of 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 spent the majority of my Foreign Service career in sub-Saharan Africa, serving in five postings – including as USAID Mission Director in Nigeria and Uganda, and Deputy Director in Ghana. Most recently I have served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya - countries at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. Serving in Africa over a span of twenty years provides me with an understanding of the challenges that Burundi faces and the opportunities they present. If confirmed, I will work closely with the government and people of Burundi to strengthen our bilateral relationship and support its burgeoning democracy.

A friend of the United States, Burundi is also one of the world's poorest countries with 70 percent of the population living below the poverty line. A young, unskilled labor force, high population density, and reintegrating returning

refugees from Tanzania poses daunting challenges for Burundi's fledgling democracy and struggling economy.

Despite these challenges, it is important to note the steps Burundi has taken toward achieving peace, stability, and democratic transition. The Arusha Peace Accords, signed in 2000 and codified in Burundi's 2005 constitution, created a framework for power-sharing and de-ethnicizing political competition.

Burundi has held two rounds of successful democratic elections; in 2005 and 2010, when President Nkurunziza was re-elected for a second term.

However, Burundi's institutions of democracy are young, and evolving. There remain very serious challenges relating to the protection of human rights, trafficking in persons, political violence and extrajudicial killings. Endemic corruption, coupled with a lack of judicial independence and transparency create a culture of impunity that has lasted for decades. These are challenges must be actively engaged. If confirmed, I am committed to speaking out against these serious problems, working to advance the protection of human rights, pushing for accountability and real progress on establishing independent justice mechanisms, and working in partnership with the Burundian government and civil society organizations to strengthen and protect the gains made with democratic institutions - a critical step toward achieving successful elections in 2015.

A committed contributor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since its inception in 2008, Burundi is a critical partner of the United States in our collective efforts to fight the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group Al-Shabab. Currently six battalions of Burundian troops support AMISOM operations with a total strength of 5,542 soldiers, making it the second largest troop contributor to this important mission.

Ranking #185 of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, transforming Burundi's economy to produce sustainable job-creating growth is a cornerstone toward maintaining long-term peace and stability. Reliant on subsistence agriculture, Burundi faces high unemployment, food shortages, a growing youth population and historic land disputes. HIV/AIDS and high rates of maternal and child mortality further undermine the economy.

To address these issues, the Burundian government adopted a Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) in 2006, and is now implementing Phase II in accordance with its economic plan Vision Burundi 2025 launched by the government in 2011. This vision focuses on economic diversification with private sector development, strengthening rule of law, good governance and promoting gender equality, and improving access and quality of social services. A key factor in achieving these goals will be Burundi availing itself to a larger regional market and improved trade and investment regime by fully participating in the East

African Community's efforts to advance regional integration. The United States supports continued development assistance to Burundi, with an emphasis on health and HIV/AIDS.

America's relationship with Burundi has been historically constructive, based on trust and shared values. If confirmed, I will build on that solid foundation, and work tirelessly 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.