

Statement of Michelle Gavin
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Botswana
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
April 05, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Botswana. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me by putting my name forward for your consideration. I am also deeply grateful for the support of my husband, David Bonfili, my daughter Clara, and my parents, Michael and Jeanette Gavin.

My own professional background has left me keenly aware of the importance of working with this Committee and the Congress. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to advance U.S. interests in Botswana, including maintaining its strong tradition of democratic governance, encouraging economic diversification, and combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For many years I served on the staff of Senator Russ Feingold, who focused intensely on African issues during his tenure on this Committee. Most recently, I was a Special Assistant to President Obama and Senior Director for African Affairs on the National Security Staff, a position that gave me new insight into the importance of our partnerships on the continent and a rich understanding of the critical role that interagency cooperation plays both in Washington and in the field as we work to achieve our foreign policy objectives.

Upon independence in 1966, Botswana was, by many measures, one of the poorest countries on earth. Today it is a middle-income country and an exemplar for the continent, having consistently maintained a democratic government,

responsibly managed its natural resources, and invested in its people and infrastructure. Botswana is an excellent partner and our bilateral relationship is strong, grounded in a shared commitment to democracy, good governance, and human rights.

The United States and Botswana also share an interest in ensuring the sustainability of Botswana's success by deepening economic diversification and promoting regional economic growth and development. Botswana aims to strengthen the non-diamond sectors of its economy, creating jobs and opportunities for the next generation of Botswana, and supporting this endeavor through partnership with the United States, including increased bilateral trade, will be one of my priorities. In addition, if confirmed, I will serve as the United States' representative to the Southern African Development Community or SADC. Regional integration and cooperation are essential to the long-term stability and prosperity of all of southern Africa's countries, and I look forward to exploring appropriate opportunities to work with SADC to promote these objectives.

Despite a remarkable commitment on the part of the Government of Botswana to save its citizens from HIV/AIDS, and despite strong support from the United States and non-governmental entities, Botswana still has the second highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world. Much has been done to combat the epidemic, particularly with regard to treatment. Currently 83 percent of Botswana who need anti-retroviral treatment receive it free of charge from the Government of Botswana. This success could not have been achieved without the \$480 million in support provided by the United States through PEPFAR since 2004. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to ensure that taxpayer resources are used effectively in combating HIV/AIDS in Botswana, working to build on existing successes and focusing critical attention on prevention, where more gains must be made.

In Accra in 2009, President Obama said, “I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world, as partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect.” Botswana is a small country, but plays an important role both regionally and globally. Botswana has been a strong, clear voice in support of human rights around the world; in fact it was among the first countries to sever relations with Libya when it became clear that the regime in Tripoli was prepared to massacre its own citizens in order to cling to power. In partnership with the United States, Botswana hosts an International Law Enforcement Academy that helps law enforcement professionals from around the continent sharpen their skills and improve their capacity to combat transnational crime. Botswana is an international leader in conservation and has important insight to offer in global discussions regarding environmental issues. If confirmed, I look forward to encouraging leadership by the Batswana on a range of issues where our interests align.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.