

Statement of Record
Patricia Mahoney
Ambassador-designate to the Central African Republic
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 20, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I feel privileged and grateful to appear before you today. I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Central African Republic.

During my time serving in the Department of State, I have worked to advance the United States' diplomatic and policy objectives as deputy chief of mission for our embassies in Uganda and Nepal, Director of South Asia for the National Security Council, and currently as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. Throughout the course of my career, I have felt honored to serve the American people and to represent our nation and its democratic values.

I also appreciate the tremendous responsibility that Embassy leadership has to safeguard the safety and welfare of American citizens and Embassy staff abroad. I recognize that, if confirmed, I will be assuming leadership of an embassy in a country in which the United States has suspended operations three times and carried out numerous evacuations. If confirmed, my focus will remain on the wellbeing of our citizens in the Central African Republic, as well as the talented

and dedicated U.S. and Central African colleagues I will be responsible for leading in Bangui.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, the Central African Republic is a fragile country still scarred by its horrific civil war in 2013 and still battling the triple menaces of extreme poverty, armed violence, and instability, in the region and within its own borders. More than a quarter of the country's population has been displaced over the past decade and more than half of the country relies on humanitarian assistance for their health and basic needs. The immediate neighborhood just outside its borders consists of six African nations all working through varying degrees of insecurity and governance challenges. Additionally, inter- and intra-communal violence continues over transhumance issues and control of natural resources - such as land, water, gold, and diamonds - deepening mistrust between communities.

Of profound concern is the fact that since December, we have seen the deleterious impact of Russian-supported mercenaries from the Wagner Group on the safety and security of many of the country's people, which further erodes prospects for regional stability. President Touadéra has critical choices to make in the near term regarding with whom he chooses to partner. This choice will affect the United States' – and allies' – ability to stand with his government.

At this juncture, our continued engagement – in concert with allies and like-minded partners – is vital to ensure that President Touadéra, who faces a multitude of unenviable and interrelated challenges, makes the right choice. If confirmed, I will seek to continue the leadership that our current Ambassador Lucy Tamlyn has demonstrated to show ourselves a good-faith and reliable friend to the people of the Central African Republic, a friend that promotes reconciliation, good governance, and a reinvigorated 2019 Peace Agreement, rather than continued armed confrontation and military adventurism, as the best path forward. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to represent that best choice we offer, both for the good of the people of the Central African Republic but also for our own humanitarian and strategic interests in the region as well. I think it is important we remain engaged in the Central African Republic to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to its at-risk population, to bolster efforts toward an inclusive and legitimate national dialogue, to encourage fidelity to the 2019 Peace Agreement, to reinforce peacebuilding and conflict mitigation efforts, and to continue to support, as we have since 2014, the vital role played by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA), one of the largest and most challenging multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions in the world.

If confirmed, I will work with President Touadéra, the Central African Republic government, and our partners to strengthen democratic institutions, advance the rule of law, improve access to justice, enable effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, and increase transparency in the mining sector. Further, I will strive to promote respect for human rights, develop responsible security alternatives to malign Russian-supported mercenaries, urge further progress on combatting human trafficking, and encourage accountability at all levels of the government. My goal is to work with the Central African Republic government and our partners to help the country begin the transition from lifesaving humanitarian assistance to sustainable development.

Truly, it is not in our interest – nor the world’s – for conditions to return to the tragic violence we witnessed in 2013.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I recognize that, if confirmed, I will be assuming leadership of an embassy in a country that is contending with an array of threats to its integrity, its security, and its ability to satisfy even the most basic needs of its population. The task is enormous; the challenges complex and exigent; and the need immense. I am grateful for your advice and counsel in this undertaking, I want to reiterate my thanks for giving me the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.