

Statement of Richard Bell
U.S. Ambassador-Nominee to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 17, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am humbled to have been selected to appear before you today and am grateful to the President and Secretary Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to furthering this important bilateral relationship, and advancing America's interests in Côte d'Ivoire.

I would like to thank my parents, Bill and Cathy Bell, who gave my brothers and me an enriching upbringing on three continents, an unwavering example of integrity, humility and grace, and a love for our country that our international experiences only served to strengthen. My brothers Mark and Paul have been inspiring me for decades. I am the proud father of Annis and Will, and so grateful to their mother Vicky, without whom I probably never would have joined the Foreign Service. I would also like to thank Ambassador Don Yamamoto, now our ambassador to Somalia: when he was running the Africa Bureau of the State Department, he went above and beyond in advocating for an ambassadorship for me.

In my twenty-eight years as a Foreign Service Officer, I've had the privilege of serving on or near four continents, including three full tours in Africa: Madagascar, Ethiopia, and Niger - where I was Chargé d'Affaires for a year. Since September 2018, I've been serving as the Chargé d'Affaires in Chad. Not coincidentally, three of those African postings were in Francophone countries, where I was able to put my French fluency to good use. I look forward to getting to know personally the "jewel of West Africa," Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire has seen immense success since 2011, after emerging from civil conflict, and is once again an engine of growth in West Africa. The country went from negative growth and stagnation during a decade-long conflict, to real GDP growth of seven to nine percent annually since 2012. Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest exporter of cocoa beans and raw cashews, and one of the best-performing economies in the world. The U.S. government is supporting the Ivoirians in this growth. In 2017, a 525 million dollar Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact was signed to support the country's education and transportation sectors. In addition, in December 2018, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and the Foreign Minister of Côte d'Ivoire signed a memorandum of understanding which aims to help U.S. companies increase investment in Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire will host the 2019 African Growth and Opportunity Act Annual Forum in Abidjan this August.

Côte d'Ivoire is the United States' largest Francophone Africa trading partner, and the United States imports 15 percent of Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa. Almost every M&M and Snickers bar that Mars sells here in the United States contains Ivoirian cocoa. I am aware of concerns about child labor in the cocoa sector and know that the Embassy is working closely with the Ivoirian government, NGOs and the chocolate industry to address these concerns. Much of our engagement with Côte d'Ivoire addresses factors that can contribute to child labor. We are thus active in supporting women's economic empowerment, improving access to education, and improving health services. Our efforts to increase law-enforcement capacity will help Côte d'Ivoire deal with those who use child labor and exploit children in forced labor.

Energy and economic growth are key areas of engagement for the U.S.-Ivoirian relationship. USAID supports the expansion of the Power Africa initiative to Côte d'Ivoire, with a focus on helping the Ivoirian government's program to increase connectivity to the national power grid, especially in rural areas. In 2019, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency approved three feasibility-study projects in biomass, hydro, and smart grid. USAID is implementing a Trade Africa program that includes promoting regional trade in key value chains under the Ivoirian national export strategy.

If confirmed, I will support Côte d'Ivoire's economic efforts to achieve inclusive growth through a diversified, modern economy. I would encourage Côte d'Ivoire to create an environment that is even more conducive to private-sector-led growth and that creates employment opportunities for its people, including women and youth.

Côte d'Ivoire aims to become an emerging economy by 2020, but to meet this goal the country must sustain its impressive economic growth, distribute benefits more broadly, improve government services, strengthen democratic institutions, improve security sector governance, and conduct free and credible elections in 2020.

Our Embassy is actively promoting good governance and respect for human rights in Côte d'Ivoire. USAID, for example, supports an increasingly capable, professional, and organized civil society and media active across the political landscape. USAID focuses on strengthening the electoral process and encouraging greater voter participation, particularly among youth and women, urgent needs in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential election.

A strong democracy, political inclusiveness, and reconciliation will be necessary to solidify Côte d'Ivoire's economic success and ensure the country does not fall back into civil conflict. If confirmed, I will work with the government of

Côte d'Ivoire to strengthen governance, enhance transparency, and become increasingly responsive to citizen needs. I will also support democratic institutions and advocate for 2020 presidential elections that are free, fair, and thus credibly reflect the will of the Ivoirian people.

I would also continue U.S. support for the Ivoirian people through our significant investments in Health. U.S. global health assistance is by far the largest area of U.S. development assistance in Côte d'Ivoire, programmed through multiple U.S. agencies, including CDC, USAID and DoD. The U.S. government, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), supports the majority of Côte d'Ivoire's national HIV response, nearly \$1.6 billion since 2004 in assistance provided by the United States to help Côte d'Ivoire achieve control and eventual elimination of its HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Côte d'Ivoire is entering a critical phase in its post-conflict recovery process. The country will need strong support and smart bilateral cooperation from the United States and other international partners to consolidate the democratic and economic gains it has made since the end, in 2011, of more than a decade of conflict. With the right support, Côte d'Ivoire will serve as an engine for economic growth and a model for private-sector-led development in West Africa. We are expanding our security cooperation with Côte d'Ivoire – a troop-contributing country to the UN peacekeeping mission in neighboring Mali – to

strengthen its capacity to play a crucial stabilizing role in a region that is increasingly at risk due to terrorism and other transnational threats.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee for this opportunity to appear before you. The Ivoirian people – from the president and his government to the humblest cocoa farmers – are friends of America. If confirmed, I will strive to keep it that way, to reinforce our interests in a stable, prosperous and peaceful Côte d’Ivoire. I warmly welcome any questions.