

**Statement of Maria Elena Brewer  
Ambassador-Nominee to the Republic of Sierra Leone  
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
July 26, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Booker, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and for your consideration of my nomination by President Trump to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank President Trump and Secretary Tillerson for their trust in me to lead the U.S. Embassy and to maintain our relationship with Sierra Leone. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I will uphold that trust. I am honored and very fortunate to have my husband, Mark, and our eight-year-old daughter, Arina, here with me today. I thank both of them for their constant love and support. Without them, I would not be here before you today.

Sierra Leone has shown remarkable progress in maintaining peace, strengthening democracy, and working toward an environment suitable for economic growth. Its perseverance is especially remarkable considering the challenges it has endured. After its devastating decade-long civil war, Sierra Leone rebuilt itself and made notable economic progress. Sierra Leone saw impressive economic growth in 2012 and 2013. But in 2014, the Ebola crisis struck. By late 2015, roughly 14,000 individuals in Sierra Leone contracted the disease, of whom approximately 3,900 died.

In late 2015, Sierra Leone adopted a post-Ebola recovery plan, which received indirect and direct U.S. support. While damage from the Ebola crisis is still evident, collaborative efforts such as USAID's Ebola Transmission Prevention and Survivor Services Project have helped Sierra Leone to make great strides in combatting the epidemic and advancing in its aftermath. Sierra Leone ranks eighth from the bottom among countries on the UN's Human Development Index. One in eight Sierra Leonean children will not live to age five. Sierra Leone has one of the world's highest rates of maternal mortality. Sierra Leone must allocate funds and resources to public health; doing so will be crucial to the country's future progress. If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority.

Good governance and the rule of law will be key. The United States has made great inroads in working with Sierra Leone. Through programs funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Immigration, Narcotics, and Law Enforcement Affairs, Embassy colleagues have built relationships that have resulted in tangible diplomatic and law enforcement achievements. These include extraditing a U.S fugitive and repatriating Sierra Leonean nationals from the United States. These projects have bolstered access to justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and security for ordinary Sierra Leonean citizens. If I

am confirmed, I would plan to increase collaborative efforts toward mutually beneficial goals for Sierra Leone and for our bilateral relationship.

Also if confirmed, I will continue our focus on strengthening democratic institutions and combatting corruption. Since 2002, Sierra Leone has held three successful presidential and legislative elections that were broadly judged to be free, fair, and transparent. Sierra Leone has an important presidential election in March 2018. If confirmed, I will make it a priority in my first months to engage with candidates and other stakeholders to advocate for another free and fair election with a peaceful transfer of power.

I will also work to continue U.S. support for market-oriented endeavors and to boost employment in Sierra Leone. The International Monetary Fund predicts growth of 6-7 percent for Sierra Leone in 2017 and 2018. If confirmed, I will advocate for transparency, accountability, and economic sustainability. And at the same time, I will work closely with the U.S. business community to encourage greater trade and investment between our two countries as a way to spur prosperity both for U.S. citizens and Sierra Leoneans.

I should emphasize that we are starting off on a strong footing with our relationship with Sierra Leone. We have many shared goals, as evinced by our successful projects in country. If confirmed, I will enhance our strong bilateral relationship as we work together to achieve new goals in an increasingly

globalized world, while maintaining our principles of promoting democracy and rule of law.

In addition to these policy aims, I hold paramount the safety and security of hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do all within my power to ensure the security of our Mission and oversee its smooth operation.

My initial introduction to Africa was as a first-tour, entry-level officer, when I was in Lagos, Nigeria. I was then posted to Freetown, Sierra Leone, for my second tour from 1999 through 2001. At the time, Sierra Leone was suffering through the last years of their brutal civil war. Despite their many hardships, the positive spirit and resilience of the people of Sierra Leone moved and impressed me. After several tours in South Asia, including India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, I returned to the African Affairs Bureau in Washington, D.C., serving in the Executive Office from 2010 until 2013. I then served as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Abuja, Nigeria from 2013 until 2016. If confirmed, I would bring a strong understanding of the African continent and its people, as well as the knowledge and experience to successfully advance our national interests in Freetown.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.