

Statement of Michael A. Hammer
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador
to the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 31, 2018

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Booker, and distinguished members of the Foreign Relations Committee, it is a great honor and privilege to appear before this committee seeking the Senate's confirmation for a third time, on this occasion as the President's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary of State have placed in me for this challenging assignment.

My family's history motivated me to serve our great country. I am a first-generation native-born American. My grandparents on my father's side fled Nazi Germany to France and then Ecuador before immigrating to the United States. My mother, Magdalena Altares, hails from Spain and met my father when he was serving in the U.S. Air Force at Torrejon Air Force base in the outskirts of Madrid. My father, Michael Peter Hammer, gave up his life in service to our country as I turned seventeen and rests across the Potomac on the hallowed grounds of Arlington. I knew then that I wanted to become an American diplomat, and my mother unequivocally supported my dream despite the risks inherent in our profession. Gracias Mami, no podría haber logrado esta carrera diplomática sin tu apoyo.

The Foreign Service, like your public service, is a family affair. I would like to recognize my wife Margret Bjorgulfsdottir, who has been my partner as we have served our nation for the past 30 years. When we were in graduate school at Fletcher up in Boston, Margret encouraged me to send in the paperwork for the Foreign Service knowing that it would derail her career. I would not be here today were it not for her steadfast support and sacrifice.

I would like to also thank our three children, who have handled well, and mostly with good humor, our many Foreign Service moves: Monika, Mike Thor, and on this particular occasion our youngest, Brynja, who if the Senate confirms me, will be affected during her senior year in high school.

The United States has important interests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

After two coups, more than thirty years of dictatorship under Mobutu, a regional war that left millions dead, and President Joseph Kabila's 17 years in power, the DRC is on the cusp of its first peaceful, democratic transition since independence. In holding these elections on December 23, President Kabila can achieve a significant legacy that advances the interests of his country and delivers an opportunity for a more peaceful and prosperous future for the Congolese people.

A stable Democratic Republic of the Congo is in the strategic interest of the United States. The DRC is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa; it is the size of the United States east of the Mississippi, and borders nine other nations. A failed election or turbulent transition could further destabilize not only the DRC and its over 80 million people, but also its many

neighbors. Increased conflict in the DRC is already resulting in higher numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees crossing into neighboring countries, with 780,000 Congolese that have fled to countries across central and southern Africa. A free, fair, and credible election in December would pave the way for a more stable DRC and Central African region.

Our U.S. interagency team in Kinshasa, together with our highly skilled and dedicated Locally Employed Staff, are hard at work to advance America's interests. If confirmed, I would be honored to lead Mission Kinshasa at one of the truly decisive points in the DRC's 58 years of independence and focus our efforts in five overarching priority areas:

Enabling Democracy, Promoting Good Governance, and Protecting Human Rights

My top immediate policy objective, if confirmed, will be advancing credible elections and a peaceful democratic transfer of power. The DRC government must respect the constitution, honor the tenets of the December 2016 St. Sylvestre Agreement, and uphold its commitment to hold elections on December 23 to elect a new president. While elections will not solve all of the country's many challenges, they are a necessary step toward securing greater peace and prosperity. Basic freedoms and human rights must be upheld and respected. It is what the Congolese people demand and deserve, and the United States – as their enduring partner – will assist in this effort.

Advancing Security, Combating Corruption, and Increasing Transparency

According to UN estimates, there are over 100 armed groups operating in the DRC. The DRC hosts the largest United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operation in the world – the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). Together with our Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and her team, Embassy Kinshasa will continue to support MONUSCO's efforts to protect civilians and enable a credible election. At the same time, there must be greater commitment by the DRC to reform its security institutions and build a more professional, transparent, and accountable police and military. We continue to demand justice for the tragic deaths of U.N. Security Council Group of Experts Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan.

A peaceful democratic transition is also imperative for spurring economic growth and investment. The DRC has substantial natural resource wealth, including an estimated \$25 trillion in mineral reserves, yet remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It has the world's largest reserves of cobalt, plus copper, uranium, tantalum, tungsten, tin, diamonds, and gold. Many of these minerals are critical to U.S. industry. The DRC is also home to rich and unparalleled biodiversity, but in 2017 the DRC was named one of three Countries of Concern for Congress's END Wildlife Trafficking Act.

DRC's current business climate is difficult and not conducive to foreign investment. Improved economic governance and respect for rule of law are essential to maintaining U.S. access to strategic minerals and to enable American businesses to effectively compete with

Chinese firms. If confirmed, I intend to continue our efforts to combat corruption and increase transparency.

Addressing the Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis

The United States has been the DRC's most generous donor for humanitarian and development needs. An estimated 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the DRC, including 7.7 million who face acute food insecurity, 4.5 million IDPs, and 530,000 refugees from neighboring countries. If confirmed, I will work closely with the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), other international donors, and non-governmental organizations as we continue this important humanitarian effort while seeking to address the underlying drivers of this urgent crisis and help set the DRC on a path to sustainable development and self-reliance.

Ensuring an Effective Response to Outbreaks of Infectious Diseases

The DRC has experienced nine outbreaks of Ebola since the disease was first discovered there in 1976, most recently a 10-week reemergence that ended on July 24. The DRC's health officials have considerable experience and expertise responding to, and containing, infectious disease outbreaks. Much of this expertise was developed through decades of close collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), USAID, National Institutes of Health, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, among others, and through shared commitment to initiatives such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). Together, these agencies implement major U.S. government health programs in the DRC, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), and the GHSA. If confirmed, I intend to continue to support the work of these expert U.S. agencies, capable Congolese authorities, and other international partners to prevent future epidemics and potential pandemics.

Serving and Protecting American Citizens

As when I was Ambassador to Chile, I firmly believe that the success of our diplomacy depends on our people and, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of our mission staff and the American community. I recognize that our Embassy personnel in Kinshasa are serving under difficult conditions in a high-threat post with decaying infrastructure, and I will be focused on ensuring we have the necessary support that my team and their families require.

The challenges in the DRC are daunting. The stakes are high. Absent a democratic transition and subsequent significant improvement in governance and rule of law, the risk of large-scale violence and deaths, regional conflict, mass starvation, and/or a pandemic will increase. The DRC is a tough assignment, but one that we as Foreign Service Officers relish – an opportunity to advance America's interests, do some good, and make a difference!

If confirmed, I would welcome discussing with you and your Congressional colleagues how best to advance our interests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I value your engagement and am happy to begin that conversation now and answer any questions you have today or in the future. Thank you.