

Confirmation Testimony
Ambassador David M. Robinson, Assistant Secretary-Designate
Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

It is an honor to be here today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. I am grateful for the confidence President Obama, Secretary Kerry, and Under Secretary Sewall have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of the Committee to advance the difficult work of preventing and responding to violent conflict.

I have spent much of my 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer, almost half as a member of the Senior Foreign Service, in conflict zones and unstable environments, from Afghanistan, Bosnia and Central America, to other regions of Asia and Africa scarred by war and persecution. I know intimately the civilian costs of violent conflict, atrocity and extremism, and I have worked extensively with other actors in the international community to overcome them.

Unfortunately, the cost in ruined lives and political instability continues to grow. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide is now nearly 60 million, more than at any time since World War II, and no corner of the world is immune. Even where representative civilian governance is taking root—some 30 African countries will have elections over the next two-and-a-half years—those exercises in democracy must be protected against threats to violently undermine or delegitimize them.

Conflict carries other costs, as well, sapping our diplomatic, military and development resources. There is no simple solution, including, as the President and the Secretary of State recently noted, a purely military response. Instead, we have to use all the tools at our disposal, including civilian ones, to anticipate and prevent conflict, wherever and whenever we can. A focus on prevention is not only more cost effective; it also gives us the space to find effective, lasting political and social responses to these challenges.

Three and a half years ago, CSO was created to enhance the State Department's ability to prevent and respond to conflict, giving the Secretary of State, regional Assistant Secretaries and our Ambassadors the information and tools they need to more effectively understand and respond to the threat of violent conflict. There have been notable successes. CSO's talented and dedicated staff, for example, is supporting interagency efforts to stem the tide of Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa and Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. They have helped prevent violence around elections in Kenya, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. And they have strengthened civilian security in some of the most dangerous parts of Central America.

At the same time, I know well that CSO's mission and methodology have not always been clear and consistent. I read last year's hard-hitting Inspector General report. Most of the recommendations have already been closed, and the few remaining are well on their way to successful conclusion. These changes reflect a maturing culture within the Bureau. I welcome the chance to make them enduring and to better integrate the bureau within the work of the Department.

What CSO needs now is seasoned leadership. If confirmed, my priorities will be:

- To ensure the Secretary and our embassies have reliable tools based on solid analysis and lessons learned to anticipate, prevent, and respond to conflict, especially the most severe forms of conflict affecting civilians, such as atrocities and violent extremism.
- To assure accountability and effectiveness of our efforts through robust monitoring and evaluation and sound management controls.
- To serve as an active resource for and active partner with the Department and with our interagency and international counterparts in tackling these challenges.

Finally, if confirmed, I assure you I will lead a Bureau that strengthens American diplomacy where it is needed most, where conflict and extremism undermine United States interests and values.

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions.