

**Statement of Ambassador-designate Virginia E. Palmer  
Republic of Ghana  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
September 29, 2021**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Ghana. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me by putting my name forward for your consideration. I am deeply grateful for the love and support of my husband Ismail Asmal, a retired Foreign Service Officer, my daughters Aliya and Nadia Asmal and son-in-law Paul Adamson, my mother Becky Palmer and late father Richard Palmer. I would also like to thank my foreign and civil service colleagues across the government and Embassy locally engaged staff who do tremendous work, in very challenging circumstances, to strengthen U.S. partnerships with countries around the world.

I have had the good fortune to have represented the country I love in fascinating countries around the world for 35 years, 15 in Africa. Throughout my career, I have worked to share American models of democracy and governance and private sector-led growth. As Ambassador to the Republic of Malawi, I oversaw an annual budget of \$500 million and led a talented team which helped Malawi achieve HIV epidemic control, improve food security, and serve as a democratic model for the Continent. As Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires in South Africa, I helped manage one of our largest missions and most complex relationships in Africa. If confirmed, I will also draw on experience gained as a leader of the State Department's Counter Terrorism Bureau to support Ghana's work to counter the spread of violent extremism in the region, and as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources to help Ghana deal with significant energy sector challenges – and opportunities. I bring to the job a commitment to the security and well-being of Embassy staff and a passion for diversity and inclusion, essential to getting policy right and properly representing our values overseas.

Our close partnership with Ghana spans more than 60 years and is rooted in our shared commitment to democracy and human rights for all, peace and security, and economic opportunity and prosperity. Ghana's long democratic tradition, robust media, religious tolerance, and strong civil society make it a leader in West Africa and a model for the continent. With democratic backsliding in the region, Ghana's example and leadership is ever more important.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and Congress to advance U.S. interests in Ghana. My priorities will be encouraging inclusive economic growth and strengthening regional stability to make the United States – and Ghana — more secure and more prosperous. Essential to success in these endeavors will be work to help Ghana strengthen its democracy and governance institutions.

Close to 120 American businesses are active in Ghana and the country's economy is beginning to recover from the pandemic. Until COVID-19 disrupted global markets, Ghana's economy was one of the fastest-growing in the world, with GDP growth of seven percent from 2017 to 2019. Bilateral trade exceeded \$1.5 billion in 2020. If confirmed, I will be a vigorous advocate for American companies and innovation and will ensure U.S. public and private investments continue to support pandemic recovery efforts and Ghana's journey to self-reliance. We will continue to help Ghana create an enabling environment for inclusive private sector-led growth by facilitating regional trade, improving access to credit, improving agricultural production and market access, enhancing domestic resource mobilization, and improving health and education outcomes. Working in partnership with our Ghanaian friends to combat corruption and ensure a welcoming and transparent environment for business will be crucial to success of these efforts.

Ghana is a key security partner, and its leadership is critical to U.S. efforts to promote regional stability and combat violent extremism. We enjoy robust bilateral military and law enforcement cooperation. Ghana is among the top dozen contributors to UN peacekeeping missions and regularly hosts regional military exercises in partnership with the United States, including this year's Gulf of Guinea maritime security exercise, Obangame Express. If confirmed, I will work to drive integrated programs on economic growth, security sector cooperation, cyber security, and maritime and border security through our bilateral Security Governance Initiative. I also look forward to working with Ghana as it chairs the Economic Community of West African States, serves on the UN Security Council, and hosts the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which will create a trading block of more than 1.3 billion people.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to partnering with you to advance America's

interests in Ghana and stand ready to answer any questions you may have now and in the future.

