

**Statement of Michael J. Dodman
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 3, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Booker, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to come before you as President Trump's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Tillerson for their confidence in me.

I am joined here today by my wife Joan and our daughter Claire. For us, the Foreign Service has been very much of a family venture, and all of us are looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that this nomination presents.

Mauritania is a strong U.S. partner in Africa, strategically located at the crossroads of the Maghreb and the Sahel. Mauritania's success and long-term stability are important to the United States. That is why we emphatically support the Mauritanian government, political parties, and civil society in their efforts to strengthen the country's democratic institutions, end slavery and its vestiges, and build a secure, united, prosperous, and free society.

Mauritania suffered vicious terrorist attacks from al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb starting in 2005. While the region continues to face serious threats from al-Qaida and similar groups, Mauritania has not experienced a terrorist attack on its soil since 2011. Mauritania's civilian and military leaders often cite our security partnership as a prime factor in this success, recognizing that U.S. training and assistance have boosted the capacity of Mauritanian security forces.

Mauritania is contributing to efforts to confront regional security threats, including by hosting, in Nouakchott, the secretariat of the G5 Sahel regional organization that brings together Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad to address trans-border threats. If confirmed, I look forward to seeking ways to further strengthen our security cooperation with Mauritania, and through them with the broader region.

Mauritania supports its neighbor, Mali, as that country also confronts violent extremism. Mauritania is supporting regional stability further by deploying peacekeepers to the UN Mission in the Central African Republic, to whom the United States provides training support. Mauritania hosts around 52,000 refugees from Mali. The United States has provided \$48 million in humanitarian assistance to Mauritania over the last five years to address food and emergency needs of Malian refugees.

Mauritania is preparing for its next presidential election in 2019. Many Mauritians seek to distance their nation from a history of autocratic governance, and the surest path to this is a commitment to democracy, in the hands of a well-informed public who enjoy equal rights and equal recourse to the law. Impartial, transparent, and accountable governance is the best means to strengthen Mauritania's national unity to promote a prosperous future.

Mauritania has struggled to achieve a national identity that fully reflects its cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. If confirmed, I will work to support Mauritians in this important effort, and that includes pressing for the implementation of laws and policies that guarantee freedom from slavery for all Mauritians and that hold accountable any individuals who infringe on the rights of others.

The focus of my three decades of work as an American diplomat has been economic diplomacy. I take great pride in the contributions I have made to build bilateral economic ties and strengthen economic development in post-communist Eastern Europe and in Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan. This is an area where I see significant opportunities in Mauritania. Bilateral commercial relations have expanded dramatically in recent years, including with the discovery of sizeable offshore natural gas resources by an American firm. A new American business forum has just been established in Nouakchott. If confirmed, I look forward to expanding our commercial and economic partnership in a manner that will provide increased economic opportunities for all of Mauritania's citizens, while also supporting America's national interests.

My recent assignments have included some of our toughest Foreign Service posts, notably my last overseas assignment leading our consulate in Karachi, Pakistan. I take very seriously the responsibility of a Chief of Mission to protect the security and safety of all resident Americans and of all U.S. government employees.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, it has been my great privilege and honor to represent the United States over the past thirty years, and to advance the interests of the American people in every country in which I have worked. If confirmed, I look forward to building on the achievements of Ambassador Larry André and his team and further advancing an American-Mauritanian partnership based on shared values and shared interests.

I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for your kind consideration of my nomination.