

**Statement of Rebecca Gonzales**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**November 1, 2017**

Chairman Portman, Ranking Member Coons, and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to be considered for the position of United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho. I am grateful for the confidence President Trump and Secretary Tillerson have shown in me by this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests and supporting Lesotho in its efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, reverse its HIV/AIDS epidemic, and achieve sustainable, broad-based economic growth.

I would like to take a moment to recognize and thank my father, Jose Rene and my mother, Estella B Gonzales. My father, Colonel Jose Rene Gonzales, served in the United States Air Force for 26 years and was buried in 2013 with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. My mother, Estella, has been a D.C. public school teacher for 30 years, and, indeed, I am fortunate to have her with me today. I would also like to recognize my son, Imagine Alexander, who just started his studies at the University of California and is unable to be here today. I would also like to thank my brother and sister-in-law Jerome and Amanda Gonzales. I appreciate the support of my friends and colleagues who are here with us today.

As a military family member I lived abroad, and this gave me a great appreciation for other cultures and a desire to serve my country by joining the Foreign Service. I have had the privilege of serving my country for 25 years as a Foreign Service Officer, serving in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. It is this experience and a recognition that there is still much to learn that has prepared me, if confirmed, for the important task of advancing U.S. relations with Lesotho.

It will be an honor to continue to serve. If confirmed, I will focus on further strengthening the relationship between our two countries. My priority will be to protect and advance U.S. interests. This includes doing everything in my power to ensure the safety of Americans in Lesotho -- those who will fall under Chief of Mission authority, the approximately 90 Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Lesotho, along with the approximately 600 Americans who are resident in Lesotho and those who visit the country every year.

It also includes advancing U.S. commercial interests. There are opportunities for U.S. companies to invest in Lesotho and to promote U.S. exports into Lesotho. Although Lesotho straddles the line between a lower-income and lower-middle income country, it is a largely untapped market for U.S. companies. U.S. commercial engagement can also be a powerful source of economic opportunity within Lesotho.

On the political front, we know that the steps needed in Lesotho to address the underlying causes of instability and challenges to the rule of law are difficult. Lesotho's neighbors, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), have been actively engaged to help Lesotho move beyond its recent political difficulties. The recommendations made by a recent SADC Commission of Inquiry, if fully implemented, would lay the groundwork for a strong culture of accountability and rule of law, and much-needed political reforms. I welcome the new government's commitment to implement those recommendations and, if confirmed, I will advocate and lend my support to these regional efforts.

One of Lesotho's biggest challenges is that 25 percent of the adults in the country are living with HIV/AIDS. This is the second-highest prevalence in the world. While the pandemic has devastated Lesotho's social and economic fabric, our partnership with the Government of Lesotho on health is a strong one, that is having a substantial positive impact. If confirmed, I will promote continued efficient and accountable use of our health assistance dollars in ensuring our partnership and efforts continue to make a real difference.

Lesotho has benefitted greatly from the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, which has spurred a vibrant textile and apparel industry in Lesotho. The textile industry is the nation's largest private-sector employer, with about 40,000 employees, mostly women. And, impressively, Lesotho is the second-largest supplier of textiles to the United States in sub-Saharan Africa. However, Lesotho will need to show continual progress on AGOA eligibility criteria, including those relating to rule of law and governance, to maintain its eligibility for AGOA trade preferences. If confirmed, I will encourage Lesotho's progress on the path of economic and political reform. Reform will foster economic growth, empower entrepreneurs, and attract foreign investment. I will continue to press for concrete actions that address concerns about impunity and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.