

**Testimony of Katherine J. Almquist
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Bureau for Africa
U.S. Agency for International Development
before the
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am grateful for this opportunity to appear before you as the President's nominee for Assistant Administrator for Africa at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and I would like to thank President Bush and Ambassador Tobias for the honor of this nomination. If confirmed, I will be fully committed to working with this Committee and the Congress to ensure greater results and accountability from our programming of foreign assistance resources in Africa. I am thrilled to be able to share this occasion with my parents, Ken and Janell Almquist. I would like to acknowledge their role in raising me to care deeply about the world, to appreciate the importance of public service, and to understand the responsibilities we shoulder as citizens of this great nation.

I have had the great privilege of working with USAID for the past six years, first as senior policy advisor to former Administrator Natsios, then as Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, and most recently as Sudan Mission Director. I am proud of the efforts and accomplishments of the hundreds of dedicated professionals serving in Africa and here in Washington that I have witnessed during this time and, if confirmed, supporting their work will be my highest priority. The perspectives and management experiences that I have gained at both the Agency and bureau headquarters' level, as well as from the on-the-ground reality of re-opening and running the largest bilateral mission in Africa, I believe, have prepared me for the challenge of stewarding the Agency's Bureau for Africa.

In addition, my seven years of service with one of the world's largest non-profit international relief and development organizations, working extensively on African issues,

gives me an appreciation for the non-governmental partners we rely on to implement so many of our programs in Africa. If confirmed, I look forward to working not only with the non-governmental sector, but also with the private sector and other elements of civil society in the United States that care deeply about Africa.

Americans are perhaps more aware than ever of events taking place in Africa, whether as a result of the intense spotlight currently focused on Darfur, or due to the interest of celebrities in improving the lives of African children. The challenges and opportunities present in Africa today are far greater than we can respond to, even with the generous level of official U.S. assistance to Africa provided by American taxpayers. As a result, working with all sectors of American society with an interest in improving the lives of Africans is a must. Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will see my role as Assistant Administrator as one of building bridges between the United States and Africa, working closely with Assistant Secretary Frazer, not only to represent the interests of the United States to the people and governments of Africa, but also to represent the issues and concerns of Africa to the American people.

Mr. Chairman, I have been a student of Africa for the better part of 17 years, and it has taught me many things. Africa has taught me to appreciate the great country that is ours and the freedom that most Americans take for granted. It has taught me the true value of the system of democratic governance that gives us not only the right but also the ability to hold our government accountable to the people who elect it. Africans, too, deserve to have leaders and systems of governance that are credible, capable and responsive to the needs of the people, rather than regimes which prey upon their people and exploit their resources for the benefit of the few. Democratic elections were held recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Benin, Mali and Senegal, bringing the total number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa witnessing a peaceful, democratic transition to 33, or about two-thirds of the total. Over the past 10 years, civil liberties have improved markedly in 21 sub-Saharan African countries; and political rights have shown substantial gains in 15 countries. Yet more work remains to be done.

My experiences in Africa have also taught me to appreciate the depth and breadth of diversity that is Africa, to move beyond stereotypes and clichés, to see wisdom and value in cultures that are foreign to our way of living. The lesson that has perhaps been most difficult of all, particularly as one coming from a nation used to solving problems, is to accept humility in not always being able to do so. Our responsibility - my responsibility, if confirmed - will be to contribute to marshalling the resources at our disposal and use them in partnership with Africans who must bear ultimate responsibility for “solving” the problems of Africa. Africa must chart its own course; we must determine how best to partner with the people of Africa to end the unspeakable tragedies and advance the limitless possibilities inherent on the continent.

In this regard, the emergence of the African Union (AU), a considerably more dynamic and forward-looking institution than its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, is one of the most important developments in Africa in recent decades. Along with the Regional Economic Commissions, the AU is providing a forum for the development of African policies, programs, and strategies to address African problems. Africans are also increasingly willing and able to hold themselves accountable, as evidenced by the slow but steady progress of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). These and other institutions are gradually making a major contribution toward assisting African countries to develop the good governance and stability needed to ensure that their people can enjoy the fruits of democracy, peace, and prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, as you are well aware, Africa is a region of extreme need and great promise. I firmly believe that we have never known a more favorable time than the present to build upon and consolidate the progress being made on the continent. Africa offers rich development potential, along with huge challenges, including widespread poverty, illiteracy, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, conflict, and poor governance. Addressing the challenges facing Africa is critical to U.S. security and regional stability. Africa is the world’s second largest and most populous continent, after Asia, and is a region of great strategic importance to the United States, both in terms of emerging markets and as a front in our efforts to stem and reverse the threat of terrorism.

In addition, the United States shares a unique heritage and cultural bond with the people of sub-Saharan Africa. For these reasons, the United States has assumed a leading role in meeting the commitments to Africa the G-8 nations made in 2005 at Gleneagles, Scotland. The United States is making meaningful progress in several areas critical to the continent's development such as education, food security, trade promotion, environment, and protection of women. In particular, the United States Government has committed significant resources and support to fight two of the greatest challenges in Africa, HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, under the leadership of Secretary Rice and Ambassador Tobias, the State Department and USAID have undertaken a series of reforms designed to improve the effectiveness of our foreign assistance programs and make it easier for us to coordinate our assistance and track results. Our shared transformational development goal is to *“help build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system.”* Of course, the nations of sub-Saharan Africa vary widely in terms of their relative state of development. Consequently, USAID's strategies begin by taking country context into consideration in each of our strategic objectives, with the goal of helping countries advance along the road of development in each crucial sector. If confirmed, I will ensure that assistance strategies support United States Government foreign policy objectives, are grounded in the context of the specific country in question, and are developed collaboratively with those who have the most at stake in their success or failure, our African counterparts. Most importantly, I will ensure that our programs achieve results.

While we are making progress, there is still so much to be done in sub-Saharan Africa to build upon our accomplishments; we can do even more to address the startling needs of the continent, while, at the same time, take bold steps to increase the security and well-being of our citizens here at home. In the words of President Bush:

We share with Africans, themselves, a vision of what the continent can become—a model of reform, a home to prosperous democracies, and a tribute to the strong

spirit of the African peoples. This vision is necessary, realistic, and already on its way to achievement.

If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I would like the Committee to know that I will work tirelessly to make this vision a reality. I would look forward to working with the Congress, and my colleagues at USAID and other Agencies to carrying out our foreign assistance strategy in Africa.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would like to thank you and the Committee for considering my nomination, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.