

**Testimony by Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson,
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on African Affairs
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“Examining the U.S.-Nigeria Relationship in a Time of Transition”**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking member Isakson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Nigeria – one of the most important countries in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the United States’ most strategic partners. I particularly appreciate the abiding interest of the African Affairs Subcommittee in Nigeria. I have just returned from a visit there and am pleased to share my insights on the evolving situation as well as the U.S.-Nigeria bilateral relationship.

First, let me express our shared hope that President Yar’Adua, who remains absent from the country for medical treatment, will fully recover. His absence over the last few months challenged Nigeria to find a path forward consistent with its constitution and in line with democratic principles. The National Assembly’s resolution that officially designated Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as Acting President demonstrated Nigeria’s resolve, and we commend the commitment of all elements of Nigerian society to constitutional process and the rule of law. We will

continue to support the Nigerian people as they work through their democratic institutions to resolve the challenges facing their great nation.

My visit to Nigeria underscored the continuing importance of Nigeria to U.S. national interests and the value of our bilateral relationship. It also provided an opportunity to discuss areas where the United States can engage with Nigeria on issues of importance to both countries. My meetings with a broad spectrum of political, religious, and civil society leaders across Nigeria focused on our shared values and goals, including efforts on governance, elections, anti-corruption, countering violent extremism and regional security. I stressed that the elections scheduled for April 2011 must be credible – Nigeria cannot afford a repeat of 2007. The February 6 elections in Anambra state, while deemed credible, suffered from poor logistics and administration, and as little as a 16 percent voter turnout. This is one area where the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is in need of improved leadership, must do better.

Our bilateral relationship with Nigeria remains strong and we continue to press forward our mutual strategic goals – achieving free and fair elections, building the capacity and commitment to fight corruption, promoting economic development, resolving internal conflict and enhancing Nigeria's role as a regional

leader in conflict mitigation, and developing other influential actors in Nigeria such as the State Governments and faith communities.

Elections: While Nigeria has accomplished much in the past 10 years, it still faces many challenges to meet its full potential. Nigeria's 2007 elections were marred by poor organization, widespread fraud, and numerous incidents of voter intimidation and violence resulting in the deaths of more than 300 people. The 2011 elections must be better. As such, I have urged Nigeria's leaders to make electoral reform one of Nigeria's highest priorities. I have stressed the importance of achieving peaceful transition of civilian rule through transparent, free, and fair elections. We have supported Nigerian organizations by printing Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) recommendations in English, Hausa and Yoruba, as well as organizing symposiums, seminars, and other venues to educate stakeholders.

A U.S. Agency for International Development and United Kingdom's Department for International Development team just completed a joint electoral assessment in Nigeria. We continue to urge Nigeria to implement the reforms needed to move closer to credible election processes and a peaceful transition of civilian rule through transparent, free, and fair elections. We are prepared to

provide technical assistance to Nigeria's election commission provided they demonstrate a willingness to fulfill their primary role of strengthening election administration.

Good Governance: The challenges Nigeria faces are principally ones of governance. As Secretary Clinton said clearly, "The most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's resource wealth and its population's poverty is a failure of governance at the federal, state and local level." Endemic corruption is a known culprit, but so is the failure to hold political leaders accountable to the people. Improving governance is the foundation of U.S. efforts in Nigeria at the federal, state and local levels where we seek to improve transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility. There can be little progress in reducing child mortality, fighting poverty, creating jobs, and improving the business climate without improved governance.

Economic Development: We seek to support economic development in Nigeria by advocating for improved business climate, increased power generation, and transparency in the extractive industries. Endemic corruption is a major factor behind Nigeria's consistently low ranking (125 of 183) in the World Bank's "Doing Business" report. U.S. companies have to follow the Foreign Corrupt

Practices Act, and the USG has been aggressive in pursuing companies that violate it. We will support those Nigerian institutions and organizations that fight corruption and inefficiencies that hinder economic growth.

We welcome Nigeria's efforts to reform its energy sector. We are actively engaged in seeing that Nigeria's reforms advance its own energy security and provide the income the nation needs to invest in development. We applaud Nigeria's participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and encourage Nigeria to finalize implementation of EITI's revenue transparency methodology and independent validation.

We embraced President Yar'Adua's commitment to increase power generation to 6000 megawatts by the end of the year and we hope Acting President Jonathan takes on this pledge. Major infrastructure improvements are critical to developing manufacturing and other non-oil sector industries. This is a real challenge for Nigeria and absolutely essential for the progress and development of Nigeria and its people. The decline in the country's infrastructure – from poor roads to power shortages to reduced health and education spending – has led to a decline in social indices, reduced manufacturing and food insecurity.

Regional Security Cooperation: Nigeria's commitment to regional peace and security remains exemplary in a troubled continent. Nigeria has provided the largest number of peacekeeping troops in Africa. It has fielded troops to trouble spots in West Africa and to Darfur, and played an important role in returning stability to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

We seek to enhance Nigeria's role as a U.S. partner on regional security, but we also seek to bolster its ability to combat violent extremism within its borders. Nigeria is a partner in counterterrorism efforts, and it is in this context that Nigerians have expressed dissatisfaction with their inclusion on the Transportation Security Administration's "Countries of Interest" list. Nigerians perceive this as collective punishment for the actions of a wayward son, when in fact they shared our outrage at the attack and have been providing assistance to the ongoing investigation. Let me be clear, our friendship and relationship with Nigeria is strong and continues to be based on a wide range of important bilateral issues.

We condemn the chronic politically-motivated, inter-religious violence in Plateau State, especially around Jos. The conflict flared again in recent weeks, resulting in the killings of more than 100 civilians. We urge all parties to address the hostility between religious and ethnic groups and bring perpetrators of such

acts to justice. The tensions in the north have religious overtones and are perceived by outsiders as fighting between Christians and Muslims; in fact, the real conflict is one of politics. Political leaders in Nigeria must recognize this and with the help and support of national religious leaders promote a dialogue between groups to resolve issues peacefully.

President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo last year called for mutual understanding and partnership across gender, religious, ethnic, and nationality lines. To meet this call, we seek to expand our diplomatic presence in key African countries, most critically, in northern Nigeria. Having representation in northern Nigeria will allow us to engage key Christian and Muslim leaders in the north, support the vibrant civil society, and report on political, economic and social issues.

Niger Delta: While we are currently experiencing relative calm in the Niger Delta, this region remains at the forefront of our bilateral agenda. By October 2009, the Nigerian Government persuaded all major militant leaders to renounce violence and surrender arms in exchange for amnesty, government stipends, training opportunities, and pledges of greater development for the Delta. Nigerian officials followed up the amnesty program with a series of consultations with Delta

stakeholders, including ex- militants. To date, security has improved considerably in most areas of the Delta, but ex-militants have staged protests in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta States over lack of progress on rehabilitation and reintegration.

We commend the Government of Nigeria for initiating the amnesty process and urge the implementation of the post-amnesty programs. We support efforts to establish mechanisms for positive changes in governance, curb activities of criminal elements operating with impunity in the Delta, and provide economic opportunity and needed services for residents of the Niger Delta. We have coordinated closely with the international partners and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to identify opportunities to assist the Nigerian Government in this endeavor. The UNDP sent a letter to Minister of Defense and Amnesty Committee Chairperson Retired General Godwin Abbe in December 2009 offering to engage on the Niger Delta.

During her August 2009 visit to Abuja, Secretary Clinton agreed to establish a U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission that would allow the United States and Nigeria to engage on key bilateral issues including regional security and counterterrorism, and advance discussions on governance and transparency issues, Niger Delta post-amnesty progress, and economic development.

Mr. Chairman, we are enhancing our bilateral engagement with Nigeria, despite the enormous challenges we face. We remain encouraged by the Nigerian people's commitment to their country's democratic foundation and Acting President Jonathan's public and private commitments to reform. We will seize the opportunity to work with the Government of Nigeria in these efforts. Our goal is to help Nigeria fulfill its potential as a regional leader, but the Government of Nigeria must first address the need of its citizens.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our bilateral relationship with Nigeria. I look forward to answering your questions.