

STATEMENT OF ERTHARIN COUSIN

Ambassador-Designate

U.S. Permanent Representative to the

United Nations Agencies in Rome

July 28, 2009

Madam Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for considering my nomination. I would also like to thank Senator Durbin for his kind and generous introduction.

It is my great honor and privilege to be the President's nominee for the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations Agencies in Rome, the largest and most prominent of which are the UN food agencies. I would like to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this important post. Without a doubt, this is a dynamic time to be involved in combating hunger. Never has the need world-wide been greater, but also, never has the commitment by the branches of the United States' government to promote food security been so clear.

I would like to introduce my mother Anne Cousin, my son Maurice and his wife Jenetta, my sisters Tybra, Yuvette and Zina as well my special friends Howlie Davis and Linda Crane, most of whom have flown in from Chicago to join me here today.

My sisters and I grew up on Chicago's Westside in the Lawndale community, which even during those days was one of the nation's poorest neighborhoods. I was blessed with parents who believed in our American Dream. They believed that situation did not limit the opportunities available for their

children if they could provide us with the tools of a good education and a penchant for hard work.

I recognize that if confirmed, I would follow three illustrious individuals – Ambassador and Senator George McGovern, a great proponent of school feeding who has devoted his life to helping the hungry and poor in the United States and around the world; Ambassador and Congressman Tony Hall, who was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace prize for his leadership and advocacy for hunger relief programs; and Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez, the former Director of the Peace Corps who worked tirelessly to promote economic development and food security in poor countries. If confirmed, I will stand on the shoulders of these tireless heroes and will benefit from the wisdom they impart. I believe the passion, experience and clear vision I bring to this position will help me provide the leadership necessary to achieve the hunger and poverty Millennium Development Goals.

My mother's 30-year career in social service and my father's lifetime of volunteer community development work instilled in me a passion for service and a desire to help change our world. I am not only committed to serve, but I believe I am well qualified to serve in this position. During my 25-year career, I have served in local, state and federal government roles. As a Clinton Administration appointee, I worked as White House liaison at the Department of State and then on the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development where I learned and helped support many of the successful agricultural development projects led by USAID.

As a corporate retail grocery executive, I have had the opportunity to work with the industry on food stamp accessibility issues, as well as on urban retail store development strategies. I helped build public private partnerships that resulted in the construction of stores in otherwise underserved communities across our country, providing these neighborhoods with access to fresh, quality and affordable food.

I have worked with the U.S. NGO and faith-based community to help eliminate food insecurity issues here in America. First as member of the board then as executive Vice President at America's Second Harvest, now Feeding America, I experienced first-hand from the 250 plus food banks across this country the positive difference, government, industry and caring people working together can make in the life of a hungry child.

I understand there is a significant difference between the work we perform domestically to end hunger and what will be required if we are to succeed in our efforts to provide sustainable food security for the billion hungry people around the world. If confirmed, I will have one overarching goal -- to engage with the international leadership of the UN multilateral organizations, the NGO community, the international business community as well as the other Rome based UN permanent representatives to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of those who suffer from hunger and poverty by 2015.

Of course performing the work to achieve this goal will require specific tactical activities, including working with the Secretary of State's interagency team to ensure success of our efforts to reduce global hunger. Another tactical component of our success will include communicating with all stakeholders telling our story about this nation's role in this fight to end global hunger. I believe we must expand the mission's successful public diplomacy outreach not only through educational media tours to highlight U.S. foreign assistance, but also with new media tools and social networking to broaden our target audience and increase understanding of America's global food security efforts. I also believe that continuing the work of my predecessor to reform the UN Agencies in Rome, especially the Food and Agriculture Organization, is a necessary step to accomplishing our overarching goal.

As I stated earlier, I am keenly aware that, if confirmed, I will take this position at a critical time. Recent estimates by the UN indicate that the past year's combination of shocks from high food prices and the world-wide economic crisis have increased the number of the world's hungry to approximately 1 billion people, reversing a decades-long trend in declining numbers of the hungry.

Americans are by far the most generous supporters in the fight against world-wide hunger. President Obama has requested over \$1 billion in additional development assistance funding for agricultural development for Fiscal Year 2010. This request for doubling of agricultural development assistance is designed to attack the root causes of hunger by boosting food production in developing countries, and increasing its availability by linking farmers to markets. Advancing agriculture will address poverty by raising rural incomes and improve the lives of women, who do most of the farming in Africa and often are the most marginalized. It is important to note that this new commitment will not come at the expense of our well-known leadership in providing emergency food aid. This new development assistance funding is being requested over and above our funding for emergency food aid. The United States will maintain its global leadership in emergency humanitarian food assistance, including through contributions to the World Food Program, and keep the alleviation of hunger at the forefront of the international agenda.

The United States provided nearly \$1.8 billion worth of resources to the World Food Program in fiscal year 2008 – a new record and more than 40 percent of WFP’s total resources for that year. The United States is the single largest donor to the FAO regular program, providing more than \$90 million a year to that organization -- 22 percent of its yearly budget. In 2008, the United States was also the single largest donor to FAO’s voluntarily-funded emergency agriculture relief and rehabilitation activities, which included efforts to stave off a pandemic at its animal source. And the United States has increased its indicative pledge to \$90 million over the three-year period of 2010-2012 to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which funds agricultural development projects in developing countries.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure accountability and make certain that resources provided to the FAO are fully and efficiently deployed. To this end, I will immediately engage with the leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization to expeditiously complete their structural and operational reform activities. Likewise, I will work to continue the efficient and coordinated deployment of resources provided to the World Food Program and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

I recognize the public sector alone cannot solve the global food security issue. The need is too great. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal we must coordinate with other donor governments, foundations, the private sector, recipient countries, and international organizations, in a new kind of international partnership -- a goals oriented and measurable partnership. This partnership must include comprehensive commitments and divisions of resources that will not only more effectively and efficiently tackle the problems of food security at the macro level; but, also on the ground, and include the countries and their leadership directly affected by the goodwill we all bring to this issue. Progress in the global fight for food security will require a world working together to develop and implement multifaceted solutions.

I believe there are important roles for the UN Rome-based agencies in this partnership, and, if confirmed, I will work to clarify those roles so that the agencies truly promote and support coordinated policies in the fight against hunger.

Exciting new international initiatives to combat food insecurity are being proposed. For instance, United States leadership at the recent G-8 meeting in Italy resulted in a combined pledge of \$20 billion over the next three years to promote agricultural development in developing countries. Without a doubt, President Obama's announcement of his intention to ask Congress to double U.S. agricultural development assistance to more than \$1 billion in FY 2010, and to seek an increase to \$3.5 billion over the next three years, was instrumental in achieving this remarkable announcement. If confirmed, I will work to help develop the multilateral aspects of this new initiative from the unique position of U.S. representative to the UN food agencies in Rome.

Public diplomacy continues to be a vital component of U.S. foreign policy, and, if confirmed, I will follow in the steps of my predecessors and actively engage in this important work. More people in developing and developed countries need to be informed of the important role the United States plays in providing both humanitarian food aid and assistance for agricultural development. We have a strong message that not only promotes the role of the United States as a

humanitarian benefactor, but also underscores our commitment to global development in the context of freedom, democracy, good governance, and functioning markets. Delivering this message strategically can help inform perceptions of the United States.

In closing, my success is the direct result of farm labor. My mother's father, Arch Harris, for most of his life fed, educated and clothed his family by working as a plantation field worker in Washington, Georgia. He received a weekly salary for working in Mr. Wynn's fields. He left the fields, because of age, opportunities and the fact that after so many years, trees populated most of the soil he once tilled and harvested. In his later years, my grandfather told me he liked riding in the car on the drive from Georgia to Illinois because, especially on the road through southern Illinois, he was surrounded on all sides by farms where he could get out and walk through the rows of tall corn. It comforted him to know that though he no longer worked the fields, we were still a nation with the agriculture capacity to feed our children. Working together we can provide the bottom billion with this same opportunity, the agricultural capacity to feed their children. We can help raise families up from poverty to economic stability. We can meet the Millennium Development Goals.

If confirmed, I look forward to serving and representing the United States in our drive to eradicate world hunger and malnutrition.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.