

Earl M. Irving

Ambassador-Designate to Swaziland

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

July 21, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a privilege and a great honor for me to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Kingdom of Swaziland. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have demonstrated in me by putting my name forward for your consideration. The fact that I sit in this chair before you today is the fruit of a team effort. Many people helped me get here, particularly my family, and none with such dedication as my wife Jeanne, who is with me here today. She has made many sacrifices to be at my side during my career, throughout which she has given me her unflagging love and support. My son, Michael, and my daughter, Zoe, are here as well; they have been real troopers about moving from country to country and school to school every few years.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you as I lead our nation's efforts in Swaziland to fight HIV/AIDS; promote good governance, democracy, and the rule of law; and foster sustainable economic development in the country.

In my present position as a Career Development Officer to senior-level Foreign Service Officers, I have underscored how critical it is to match the right officer with the right assignment. An assignment for which the officer in question is aptly prepared to serve, armed with knowledge of the region and the people that only previous experience in the field can give. I think that my own career experience has prepared me well to assume the responsibilities of Ambassador to Swaziland, if I am confirmed. During the course of my 26 years in the Foreign Service I have served as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe and as Principal Officer in Recife, Brazil and Melbourne, Australia, giving me over nine years' experience in managing posts on three continents with very different cultures.

My experiences in Zimbabwe, which continues to struggle to overcome more than a decade of suffering under authoritarian misrule, have particularly prepared me for the challenge of serving as the Ambassador to Swaziland, a nation in transition. Swaziland faces many challenges on the road ahead. After years of

absolute monarchy and isolationism, the government's initial political will to move the democratic process forward has regrettably waned. The passage of the country's 2006 constitution, which granted increased civil liberties to the Swazi people, created a clash between the will of the people and the prerogatives of the royal family and progress toward implementation has been slow. International observers concluded that the 2008 parliamentary elections did not meet international standards. Discrimination and violence against women and children remain a serious concern. In addition, the political opposition, members of civil society, and the media are often silenced, limiting fundamental freedoms.

Despite these challenges, I have great hope that, with some support, progress is possible. If confirmed, I will serve as Ambassador during the next two to three years, a period that will be crucial in preventing further Swazi government backsliding on the democratic reforms promised in the 2006 constitution, and encouraging further reform. Under my leadership, the U.S. Embassy would work to advance democracy in Swaziland by strengthening key government institutions, including parliament and the judiciary, that create and uphold democratic values. We should also support civil society, the media and other institutions that hold the government accountable. We must assist civil society in its quest to develop a platform and a voice to negotiate political space with the Swazi government.

Looking again to my experiences which have prepared me to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland, if confirmed, I again recall my tenure in Zimbabwe, where helping to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS remains a key USG strategic interest. Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world of 26 percent and the United States is helping Swaziland contain, reverse, and mitigate the epidemic by providing resources under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. PEPFAR's budget for Swaziland has risen from \$250,000 in 2003 to approximately \$28 million in 2009. In June, Swaziland became only the second country globally to sign a new PEPFAR Partnership Framework Agreement with the United States. In doing so, the Swazi government committed to take a more robust leadership role and accept greater accountability in achieving its public health objectives. If confirmed, I will look forward to the challenge of broadening the USG approach through the new Framework Agreement to increase Swazi government capacity to combat HIV/AIDS through careful resource management, decentralization of care, and transformative behavioral interventions to reduce the rate of new HIV infections.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has literally decimated a generation of Swazis and we must help the government in its efforts to recover. One key element in ensuring that recovery occurs is to help preserve and create vital employment and

economic opportunities that will undergird domestic economic stability. If confirmed, I will continue our work with the Swazi government to promote economic reforms and provide technical assistance to advance economic goals. In addition, I will address African Growth and Opportunities Act-related issues with vigor and support USAID efforts like the five-year Swaziland Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Program (SWEEP), which has provided credit and business training for small and medium enterprises since 2006, to help Swaziland address its serious unemployment problem.

Programs like SWEEP are vital to Swaziland's sustainable development, now more so than ever as the worldwide economic downturn takes a devastating toll on the Kingdom, which has had a generation decimated by HIV/AIDS. Close to 60 percent of the population is under the age of 19, and the 2007 Swazi census actually reported a population in decline. There are more than 100,000 orphans and vulnerable children, many heading their own households, in a country of less than one million.

Swaziland now serves as the Chair of the Southern African Development's Community's Organ on Politics Defense and Security, and plays a major role on regional security issues like Zimbabwe and Madagascar. Thus, it is even more

critical to our regional strategic interests that we ensure Swaziland is stable. And, as Swaziland firms its plans to contribute troops to UN and African Union peacekeeping missions, such as in the Great Lakes and Darfur regions of Africa, its growing regional importance becomes clearer.

As Swaziland's growing regional importance becomes clearer, so does the proof that our relationship with the country is beginning to expand. In addition to the signing of the PEPFAR Partnership Framework Agreement, the USG signed an agreement with the Swazi government expanding the mandate of the Peace Corps in Swaziland. King Mswati III was also the first African head of state with whom Assistant Secretary Carson met after being sworn into office. The Commander of U.S. Africa Command General William "Kip" Ward visited Swaziland and met with the King soon after to emphasize the ongoing importance of bilateral and multilateral military cooperation issues. With this evidence of our growing relationship and mutual respect, I look forward to serving as U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland, if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

