

Statement by Robert P. Jackson
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Cameroon
before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 28, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Cameroon. I thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the trust they have placed in me.

My family has long encouraged my interest in international affairs. My wife Babs, a speech and language pathologist and my partner for the last 21 years, is here with me today. She and I are both excited about sharing a fifth assignment in Africa.

Representing the United States has been my great privilege for the last 28 years. I am confident that my previous experience in Burundi, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Morocco, Portugal, Senegal and Zimbabwe, as well as here in Washington, will serve me well. In fact, if confirmed, I will return to the region where I first served in Africa.

The last quarter century has seen many positive changes in Central Africa and in Cameroon, but significant challenges remain. Known as "Africa in miniature" for its ethnic, religious and geographic diversity, Cameroon just celebrated 50 years of independence. Nonetheless, Cameroon faces economic, environmental, governance, health, political and social challenges. Rich in natural resources and biodiversity, Cameroon is a regional leader, and its stability, success or failure, can impact other Central and West African states.

With presidential elections scheduled for 2011 and parliamentary and municipal elections scheduled for 2012, promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law will be among my highest priorities. Free, fair and transparent preparations for the elections will be as important as the elections themselves.

Similarly, the United States must continue to partner with the Government of Cameroon, our friends in the international community, businesses, non-government organizations and international organizations to combat endemic corruption.

Should I be confirmed, my priorities will also include protecting the estimated 5,800 U.S. citizens who reside in Cameroon; building upon the United States' position as the leading investor in Cameroon by helping to improve the country's business climate and transparency; and building peace and security in Cameroon and the region.

Cameroon contributes civilian police to United Nations peacekeeping operations, works with us to maintain security in the Gulf of Guinea, provides overland access to the Central African Republic and Chad, and hosts approximately 100,000 refugees. Together, we are fostering economic growth, especially by creating opportunities for youth and women; and investing in people's health and in the environment. If confirmed, I will engage with Cameroonians to encourage and support continuation of these positive efforts.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and others in Congress to advance U.S. interests in Cameroon. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.