

Testimony of Erica Barks Ruggles
United States Ambassador-designate to Rwanda
Before Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today and to have been nominated by President Obama to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. I am humbled by the trust placed in me by President Obama and Secretary Kerry in nominating me for this position. I hope that you will also find me worthy of that trust. If confirmed, I will work closely with this Committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Rwanda.

I would like to acknowledge my husband and fellow Foreign Service Officer, Taylor Ruggles. Without him, and our strong families' love and support, I would not be here today.

Mr. Chairman, I sit before your committee today an embodiment of what so many people in so many countries admire about the United States – the fact that through hard work, effort and good education, anyone in America can become anything they want to be. I was born in the Midwest and had never even been on an airplane until I was 18, heading to university. As I did so, I felt the weight of ensuring I made the most of every minute of my education to further myself as I knew how much my family was sacrificing financially for me to go to college. That education opened up the world for me.

In my career, I have seen people just like me – from modest backgrounds with hard working families – who have not had the opportunities I did sometimes simply because they were of “another” race, tribe, religion, or gender. And because of that I have become a committed advocate for the need to give every child, every individual, the respect and opportunities they need to succeed.

Rwanda is a country that has been deeply riven by cycles of conflict, tragedy, and survival. Although Rwanda is still recovering from the 1994 genocide that killed more than 800,000 innocent people, Rwandans have shown that recovery, reconciliation, and healing are possible, even in the aftermath of a genocide that no one believed possible in our times. More, however, needs to be done to secure peace and democracy, and further expand prosperity in Rwanda for the next generation of Rwandan citizens.

Since 1994, Rwanda has made enormous progress in rebuilding itself by investing in the health and education of all of its people, laying the needed foundation for economic prosperity and sustainable growth. It has pulled over one million of its 11 million citizens out of poverty in the past ten years, and doubled per capita GDP in that same period. Economic growth has averaged over 6% for the past three years.

Rwanda is working not only to create immediate short-term jobs, but to develop a vibrant economy by meeting the basic needs of its population for potable water, roads, transportation, and health care. Rwandan children have the highest primary school enrollment rates in Africa. For both boys and girls, Rwanda is on track to achieve universal access to primary education by 2015, with a primary net enrollment at over 95 percent since 2012. And, unlike many countries in the developing world in which girls have limited access to education, Rwanda's young girls are enrolling in primary school at a rate of about 98 percent. Rwanda has also increased to well over 70% the number of children staying in school to complete their education.

To strengthen its economy, Rwanda has aggressively pursued a privatization policy that encourages foreign and local investment. It has diversified its trade outflows beyond traditional exports of tea and coffee to products such as pyrethrum (a natural insecticide), hides and skins, textiles, minerals, and specialty coffee. Rwanda is also partnering with foreign investors to increase its capacity in the areas of technology, telecommunications, and alternative forms of energy such as solar and hydro power. Rwanda has worked strategically to achieve its goal of developing into a middle-income country by 2020 and becoming an important regional hub within the East African Community for regional financial services, aviation, information technology, and tourism.

In addition to its economic progress, Rwanda has drawn on its own tragic history to try to alleviate conflicts elsewhere in the world. Rwandan police and troops have distinguished themselves as among the most capable and professional contingents to support United Nations peacekeeping missions in Haiti, as well as in regional and UN missions in Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and most recently, Central African Republic. The United States has worked closely with Rwanda since 2006 in this regard, providing over \$60 million in training, equipment, and, in some cases, logistical support to enable Rwandan deployments for these missions.

The United States, in partnership with the international community, has supported real, positive change in Rwanda. We remain Rwanda's largest bilateral donor,

having provided more than \$200 million in foreign assistance in fiscal year 2013, of which more than \$90 million is used to support the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Though Rwanda has made much progress over the last twenty years, there is still much we can do to encourage and support its development, particularly in the areas of respect for human rights and the rule of law, ensuring freedom of expression for political activities and the media, and deepening Rwanda's democracy to permit peaceful political discourse and competition. If confirmed as Ambassador to Rwanda, I will continue to urge the Rwandan government to abide by its international human rights commitments, including respect for the freedoms of assembly and expression, which are crucial to the success of any democratic system of governance. As Nelson Mandela, that great icon and statesman of South Africa said, "*To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.*"

If confirmed, I will also continue to encourage Rwanda to play a constructive role in restoring peace and stability in eastern Congo, including through full implementation of its commitments to the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework, the regional peace process signed in February 2013 that is intended to end the recurrent, devastating cycle of conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and its negative impacts on the surrounding Great Lakes region. One of the core objectives of the Framework is the eradication of all armed groups, and this must include increased international and regional efforts to neutralize the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a group whose members include individuals responsible for the Rwandan genocide.

I believe the broad range of experience I have gained in my 22-year career as a Foreign Service Officer will assist me in further advancing our goals with the Republic of Rwanda. As the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and as the Deputy to the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, I dealt with many of the kinds of issues that I would face, if confirmed, as the U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda. Having worked on Africa issues on and off since 1994, I have followed Rwanda's progress – and its ongoing challenges – with interest. My most recent posting in South Africa has only confirmed for me the important role that strong, independent democratic institutions – including independent courts, a free press and a vibrant civil society – play in safeguarding democracies and building more inclusive, more tolerant, and more stable societies.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will commit all of my energy and experience toward strengthening the relationship between our two countries and to advancing to the best of my ability the U.S. goal of a democratic, prosperous Rwanda that is at peace with its neighbors.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions that you may have.