

Statement of Frankie Reed
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored that the President has nominated me to be United States Ambassador to the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu. I want to thank the President and the Secretary for nominating me for this position and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Currently, I serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs responsible for relations with Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island posts (Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau). I have also served as the Consul General and Deputy U.S. Observer to the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Guinea and in Samoa, and as the Deputy Director in the Office of Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Affairs. My service outside of the Department of State includes that of Diplomat in Residence at the University of California and as a Pearson Congressional Fellow.

The U.S. Ambassador resident in Fiji is responsible for the bilateral relationships with five independent nations. Embassy Suva is a busy hub of American activity in the Pacific. Some 26 American employees and 80 Foreign Nationals work to advance U.S. interests over a stretch of the Pacific Ocean. The dedicated staff members collaborate with multilateral organizations, and promote regional public diplomacy activities, environmental programs and policies, the National Export Initiative, and defense-related relationships on a daily basis. If confirmed, I will engage closely with the Pacific Islands Forum continuing the good work of my predecessor, who was designated as the first US Representative to the PIF. The Embassy also has consular and commercial responsibilities for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, making this geographically the largest consular district in the world, spanning across 3000 miles and attracting approximately 55,000 Americans annually.

Fiji, located in the heart of the Pacific region, is an ethnically and religiously diverse country of 850,000 people. It is a regional transport and communications hub, as well as the site of the University of the South Pacific and the regional headquarters of many foreign aid organizations, NGOs, and multilateral organizations, including the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat. The New Embassy

Compound in Suva, opened in June this year, serves four other U.S. Embassies in the region as the hub for our Regional Environmental, Labor, Law Enforcement, Public Diplomacy, and Defense offices.

Fiji's unique position in the Pacific makes it a key focal point for our larger regional engagement with the South Pacific. In comparison with other small Pacific Island nations, Fiji has a fairly diversified economy. It remains a developing country with a large subsistence agriculture sector, and Fiji is rich in natural resources including gold, timber, and marine fisheries. For many years, sugar and textile exports drove Fiji's economy. However, neither industry is currently competing effectively in globalized markets. Additionally, remittances from Fijians working abroad, and a growing tourist industry - with 400,000 to 500,000 tourists annually - are the major sources of foreign exchange. However, Fiji's tourism industry as well remains damaged by the coup and continues to face an uncertain recovery time.

In December 2006, the Fijian military, led by Commodore Voreqe ("Frank"?) Bainimarama, overthrew the country's lawfully elected government creating a prolonged political and economic crisis in Fiji. Fiji's coup leaders have not taken any credible steps to restore democratic institutions. The public emergency regulations remain in place; the press remains heavily censored and the right to assembly is severely restricted. The United States has consistently advocated for the Fijian regime to take steps to return democracy to the Fijian people by holding free and fair elections and an end to Fiji's Public Emergency Restrictions (PER). A promise to hold in 2009 did not materialize and the government has now said it will hold elections in 2014.

A key feature of our engagement with Fiji is close consultation and coordination with Australia, New Zealand and other regional players. We seek more direct engagement with Fiji's government and encourage it to take the necessary steps to restore democracy and freedom. By taking credible steps toward an increased civilian role in government, lifting of the PERs and other democratic reforms, Fiji can work toward reintegrating into international institutions and restoring its former international role. Assistant Secretary Campbell is in the region now continuing our engagement with our friends in the Pacific; and if confirmed, I will do the same. Also, we look forward to discussing Fiji at the upcoming September Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting in Auckland.

Following the 2006 coup, the United States suspended military and other assistance to Fiji under Section 7008 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act. This suspension applies to foreign military financing, International Military Education and Training

grants, peacekeeping operations, and military aid that falls under Section 1206 of the 2006 Defense Authorization law. The U.S. will maintain these sanctions on Fiji until a return to civilian government, signaled by a transparent, inclusive, open-ended process including all elements of Fijian society. U.S. foreign assistance to Fiji has been suspended due to the coup. If it resumes due to a return to a democratically elected government, assistance will remain focused on security for Fiji.

On occasion the U.S. cooperates with civilian police authorities and, if confirmed, I will continue to work with the Fijian government on law enforcement training with police and port security officials. The U.S. also plans to provide substantive technical assistance toward an elections process once Fiji's Public Emergency Restrictions are lifted and credible democratization timetables are implemented. Fiji's Strategic Framework for Change envisions a timeline for elections in 2014, but inclusive national dialogue and concrete steps to restore a democratic process should begin as early as possible. If confirmed, I am prepared to meet with all levels of government, civil society, and other regional partners, to push for early elections and restoring democracy in Fiji.

Pacific Island nations face many of the same global issues that other countries face, but in this particular region, the repercussions can be more acute. These countries, many of them low-lying atolls, will be the first to experience the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Tuvalu, one of the world's smallest nations, has nine atolls only a few feet above sea level. Nauru's once bountiful phosphate mines are almost exhausted. HIV/AIDS, drug smuggling, and human trafficking are also growing concerns. The problem of overfishing and threatened marine resources, another global problem, hits hard in the Pacific, since Island states are dependent upon fish stocks not only for the sustenance of their people, but also as a major source of government revenue. Non communicable diseases like diabetes and heart disease among the Pacific Island population are also an area of increasing concern. Kiribati participates in regular consultations based on our 1979 Treaty of Friendship.

The challenges are many, but these small states are open to working with us, and we have learned that focused, timely engagement can have a large impact. If confirmed, I will work with all members of the U.S. government and private sectors, as well as regional partners like Australia and New Zealand to try to address these pressing issues. Historically, Pacific Island nations have been our friends but others are increasing their profile in this strategic region, and we want to ensure that nothing gets in the way of our close mutually supportive cooperation.

Despite these challenges at home, these Pacific Islands are our partners in fostering both regional and global stability. In the recent November 2010 elections, Tonga has shown its commitment to the region in being consistent in its vision towards democratization in that country. Tonga and Tuvalu were early members of the Coalition in Iraq. Tongan troops are currently serving in Afghanistan. Fiji contributes approximately 600 soldiers towards peacekeeping operations in Iraq, the Middle East, Sudan, and Liberia.

Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu occupy a strategically important portion of the Pacific. They are our partners in addressing critical global and regional issues. If confirmed, I will do my best to continue to strengthen relations between the United States and each of these five countries. Working together, we can achieve our common goals for a stable, peaceful and prosperous region.

Thank you.