

STATEMENT OF BISA WILLIAMS
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
February 2, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Niger. I am very grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence and trust in me that this nomination demonstrates. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working closely with this Committee and with your colleagues in the Congress to advance our interests in Niger and in the region.

I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri and Trenton, New Jersey, and I would like to acknowledge my family members and friends who are here today. I am especially pleased to have my son, Michael, here. Michael grew up in the Foreign Service life, and is now completing his studies for a law degree at Duke University.

In the Foreign Service, I have been honored to serve my country in increasingly responsible assignments in the State Department and in the National Security Council, as well as in Africa, Latin America, at our Mission to the United Nations, and in Europe. Throughout my career, I have worked effectively on

development and trade issues, conflict resolution, strengthening respect for human rights, and on building lasting multilateral coalitions to advance U.S. national interests. This experience will be relevant for Niger.

Niger was poised to cross a democratic milestone last fall with its first transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another. Instead, the incumbent, President Mamadou Tandja, chose to manipulate the democratic process to remain in power. As a consequence, the United States suspended non-humanitarian assistance and decided to deny visas to the Nigerien leadership. We have been a vocal critic of President Tandja's actions, as have you, Mr. Chairman. We are working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and with European Union and African Union counterparts pressing for a return to democracy and the rule of law in Niger. Such a return is vital for the message it sends to the region. It is also essential to restoring U.S. development and democracy assistance programs to Niger. For despite its natural resources, Niger is the world's poorest country, ranking last on the UNDP's Human Development Index.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operates across the Sahel, including in Niger, and we would certainly like to be able to engage with the

Nigeriens on counterterrorism. This is difficult absent a resolution of the current political crisis and Niger's return to democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to working with your Committee and other interested Members of Congress on the many challenges facing Niger. I thank you again for this opportunity, and look forward to answering any questions you or other distinguished Members of this Committee may have.