

Statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Ambassador Betty King
Ambassador-designate to the United Nations and Other International
Organizations in Geneva
December 1, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am deeply honored to appear before you today to seek your confirmation of my appointment by President Obama to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva. It is an even greater honor and privilege to be appearing before this committee for the second time in my career. I would like to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this important post.

I grew up on the tiny island of Saint Vincent in the Caribbean where the only sources of current information about the outside world were the sporadic news reports on BBC radio. I did, however, have broader access to the written word, thanks to the generosity of the great American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who built and maintained libraries across the developing world. It was in that library that I first read the Constitution of the United States of America, which cultivated my understanding and early appreciation for the difference between governance by a document that begins with “We the people” and governance by a distant monarch. It is this early appreciation that brought me to the United States as a graduate student and led to my embrace of the ideals and the opportunities of this, my adopted country.

There were three American influences that had tangible impacts on my early years: The presence of Peace Corps workers who broadened my horizons by augmenting the staffs of the secondary schools, dispensing invaluable career development assistance and guidance on college admissions; the USAID workers who provided technical assistance, training, and resources; and, most importantly, the remittances that were sent from émigrés to the United States. It would be difficult for me to overstate the impact of these influences on the development of that small country of my birth and in the broader Caribbean region. It would also be difficult to overstate their impact on the views of America’s role in the developing world and the desire of people like me to be a part of these American ideals.

The charter of the United Nations also begins with the phrase “We the peoples.” It too gives hope to millions around the world that they can peacefully coexist with their neighbors; enjoy freedom from hunger and fear; live healthy and productive lives; and, most importantly, be governed by democratically elected leaders. Although the United Nations has not always lived up to the ideals of its charter, it remains the best and most viable option for international engagement and collaboration.

In her testimony before this committee, Ambassador Susan Rice noted the imperfections of the United Nations, but she focused on the indispensability of the organization that provides a forum where countries small and large work together to address multiple challenges. Should I be confirmed, this too will be my focus.

Having spent four years at the United Nations as the United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council, I am acutely aware of the promises and shortcomings, strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations.

The Millennium Development Goals, which brought critical worldwide attention to the issues of universal education, maternal and child health, poverty and hunger, and environmental degradation, are now the universally accepted framework for development. This is the UN at its best. Unfortunately, the United Nations is also known for bureaucratic gridlock, inconsistent treatment of human rights violators, and bloc voting over careful consideration based on values.

The position for which I seek your confirmation focuses on issues that are of paramount importance to the United States. They are also issues on which I have had the opportunity to work in both the public and non-profit sectors, and I very much look forward to applying these experiences to the inherent and future challenges that these issues present to the international community.

I am keenly aware of the concerns of members of this committee and other members of Congress have about recent developments in the Human Rights Council. If confirmed, I will work closely with the United States Representative to that Council to ensure that human rights abusers do not continue to shape its agenda. I will also work to improve the effectiveness of that Council, to avoid the pitfalls of the discredited Commission on Human Rights, which it replaced, and to ensure that the promised improvements are realized.

As a member of the Board of Directors of Refugees International for the last six years, I have had the opportunity to follow closely the major humanitarian

crises of recent times, including Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraqi displacement, and Burma. From this vantage point, I have seen the United States take the lead as a donor in Darfur and the Congo. As the U.S. Representative to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, I will work to ensure that U.S. contributions are used effectively to reduce the suffering of the 12 million refugees and the 26 million internally displaced persons around the world.

Over the last seven years, my work in the philanthropic community has focused on the social determinants of health. We now know that poverty and social and physical environments are significant drivers of poor health outcomes. The World Health Organization similarly recognizes the contributions of poverty and other social factors to poor health. If confirmed, I will work to ensure continued focus on these issues and on efforts to respond effectively and expeditiously to epidemics like H1N1, and to foster health security around the world.

The U.S. Mission to the international organizations in Geneva also oversees the work of a number of technical and specialized agencies, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), International Labor Organization (ILO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), headquartered in Bern. I pledge to bring the same attention to good governance and efficiency at those multilateral organizations, and to work towards making them more efficient institutions.

The agenda of the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva is broad. In addition to the experiences that I bring to these issues, I assure you that if I am confirmed, the United States will be effectively represented in Geneva; that I will promote the interests and values of the United States; and that I look forward to working with you on the challenges ahead.

Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

