

Statement of Donald E. Booth
U.S. Ambassador-designate to Ethiopia
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
February 2, 2009

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee;

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. I greatly appreciate the trust and confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me. I am also grateful for the steadfast support of my wife Anita, a retired Foreign Service Officer who is in Zambia, where I have had the honor of serving as ambassador since 2008. With me today for support are my daughter Alison and my sons Peter and David.

In my almost 34 years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have served in both developed and developing countries, in countries with liberal democracies as well as in one of the most repressive dictatorships. Almost half of my career has been spent in Africa or working on African affairs in Washington. Early in my career I served as desk officer for Sudan and Uganda and as back up desk officer for Ethiopia where I first came to appreciate the country's rich and longstanding cultural heritage.

The United States has complex interests in Ethiopia, a country that occupies a strategic position in the turbulent Horn of Africa, and its cooperation has been and will be critical to countering threats to the United States that emanate from that region. At the same time, limitations on political expression and economic

activities, as well as shortcomings in respect for basic human rights, run counter to American principles and risk becoming the seeds of future instability. We need to try to work with Ethiopia across the board, preserving the cooperation where we share interests, such as in security cooperation and regional security, while enhancing a productive engagement on other issues that are critical for U.S. interests in the long term - food security, broad-based economic growth that is increasingly private sector driven, gender equality, good governance and respect for basic human rights.

If confirmed, I will bring my experience, commitment and energy to advancing a balanced and productive U.S. agenda in Ethiopia. I will, of course, adhere to policy guidance from the President and Secretary Clinton. I will ensure they are as fully informed as possible by accurate reporting by the entire U.S. mission in Ethiopia. This is the approach I have pursued as chief of mission in Liberia and Zambia.

I also commit to reflect American values to both the government and people of Ethiopia. President Obama said in Accra, “America will not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation.” At the same time, he observed that, “Governments that respect the will of their own people ... are more stable and more successful than governments that do not.” I believe America’s diplomats have a duty to promote respect for basic human rights and freedoms.

Ethiopia will hold elections in May. Questions about the credibility of Ethiopia’s 2005 elections led to protests and violence. If confirmed, I will seek to help Ethiopia make the upcoming elections as credible as possible, and will observe and report dispassionately on their conduct and outcome. However, elections are only

part of the democratic process, a process that the United States must continue to try to strengthen after the elections.

Ethiopia has long been the locus of humanitarian crises. U.S. official humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia over the past decade has amounted to \$3.5 billion, plus almost \$1.2 billion provided under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. If confirmed, I will strive to ensure that humanitarian assistance monies appropriated and authorized by Congress reach intended beneficiaries and are appropriately accounted for. I will seek to put more of our assistance money to work addressing the root causes of food insecurity, a goal the United States and Ethiopia should be able to jointly embrace and address. Indeed, Ethiopia's impressive economic growth fueled by investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, and services highlights the potential for sustainable development. I will ensure our PEPFAR program is focused on building sustainable capacity for Ethiopians to deal with the AIDS pandemic. This will involve investing in healthcare, not just AIDS care, and putting greater emphasis on preventing new HIV infections.

Achieving food security, regional stability, and tackling AIDS, among other objectives, increasingly involves a "whole of government" approach. If confirmed, I will insist on close interagency coordination and cooperation to achieve results from all U.S. programs in Ethiopia.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you and this Committee today. I would be pleased to answer your questions.