

Statement of Wanda L. Nesbitt

Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Namibia

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

September 22, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Ambassador to the Republic of Namibia. I appreciate the confidence of the President and Secretary Clinton in putting my name forward for your consideration. If confirmed, I look forward to advancing U.S. interests in Namibia which include deepening the commitment to democracy, encouraging economic growth, and promoting improved national health.

Much of my 29 years with the Foreign Service has been spent in Africa, including as Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire and to Madagascar. My husband, Jim Stejskal, has given me invaluable support and I am delighted that he is here with me today.

Since its independence in 1990, Namibia has held several successful elections and stands out in the region as an example of stability and good governance. U.S. relations with Namibia are strong; we share a commitment to democratic values. We have concerns, however, about corruption and limitations on press and internet freedom. One of our goals is to help strengthen Namibia's fledgling institutions. If confirmed, I will work with the Namibian government,

and non-governmental organizations on these issues.

The United States and Namibia also share an interest in increasing economic growth and prosperity. For twenty years, Namibia has worked hard to create jobs and attract direct foreign investment, but still needs assistance to diversify the economy. Through a Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact with Namibia, we are targeting three sectors where growth would help decrease poverty: tourism, agriculture, and education. The compact is designed to help Namibians benefit from a growing tourism industry, increase livestock production, and improve the education system to give more Namibians the skills employers need. Namibia has one of the highest income disparity gaps in the world; education can help narrow the divide. If I am confirmed, one of my priorities will be to encourage the rapid and efficient implementation of our MCC compact.

Namibia has a 15.3 percent HIV/AIDS prevalence rate and the third highest rate of tuberculosis cases in the world. The devastating effects of these inter-related diseases are well known and the United States remains active in efforts to combat both. Namibia received over \$100 million in PEPFAR funds in FY2009 and is included in the Global Health Initiative. An important focus is to improve the nation's health system. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to make sure that our taxpayers' resources are used effectively.

Namibia has the potential to emerge as a strong leader in southern Africa. I welcome the opportunity to promote stronger ties between our two nations and better mutual understanding. I look forward to leading a team committed to advancing our interests and to supporting one of Africa's youngest nations as it tackles the challenges of a developing nation.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.