

John Melvin Jones
Ambassador Designate to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana
Statement Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 18, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I sincerely appreciate the trust and confidence placed in me by President Bush and Secretary of State Rice in putting my nomination forward. If confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and with your Congressional colleagues both to advance our nation's interests and to protect our citizens in Guyana and the region.

Before I proceed further, and with the indulgence of the Chair, I would like to introduce two members of my family. With me today are my wife, Aaronia Jones and our daughter Christie Jones-Aden.

Mr. Chairman, for more than 27 years I have served as a career Foreign Service Officer, including at hardship posts in several regions of the world; these experiences have prepared me well to lead the U.S. mission in Georgetown. Guyana is a country striving to strengthen its fragile democracy in the face of daunting problems including an HIV/AIDS epidemic, poverty, racial tensions, drug trafficking, arms and human smuggling, ever rising rates of violent crime, and corruption that plagues many of its law enforcement agencies. To make matters

worse, Guyana suffers from a “brain drain,” as many of its educated citizens emigrate. I welcome this challenge to use my experience, my creativity, and my leadership abilities to represent U.S. interests in the context of these very serious issues.

Guyana’s problems affect U.S. security because of our interconnectedness with countries throughout the Caribbean region and because Guyana is part of the family of democracies in the Hemisphere. The United States has a special link with Guyana through the many Guyanese who have immigrated to our nation, many of whom are dual nationals and maintain strong ties to family remaining in Guyana.

We are Guyana’s largest trading partner, and we share a commitment to fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDs. The President’s PEPFAR program and the more than \$100 million Congress has appropriated since 2004 continues to make a profound impact in a country where USAID estimates that 2.5% of the adult population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Through the partnership that involves USAID, CDC, Peace Corps, DOD and other donors, PEPFAR has provided AIDS testing for more than 29,000 people, and over 2,000 individuals receive life-saving anti-retroviral drug therapy.

Guyana is becoming an ally in regional security and in the fight against narco-trafficking. In 2007, the government’s drug seizures were up, but Guyana needs assistance to professionalize law enforcement personnel and to weed out corrupt elements. If confirmed, I hope to work toward re-establishment of a U.S.

Drug Enforcement Agency office at the Embassy, something that President Jagdeo has requested and which DEA's leadership also supports.

The two-year \$6.7 million Millennium Challenge Threshold program for Guyana began implementation in fiscal 2008. Under USAID direction, the Threshold program seeks to help the Government improve its fiscal management, including implementation of a new VAT, and to improve the business climate by modernizing the business registration process. If confirmed, I will work to see that this effort proves successful.

As another priority, if confirmed, I will encourage the government to hold local elections, which were last held in 1994 and are long overdue. Local elections, the political dialogue and the empowerment that follows will strengthen democracy and serve the country well.

If confirmed, I will also be accredited to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which brings together 15 Caribbean states and a number of regional observers. I would look forward to working with CARICOM members to advance mutual interests in trade, investment, development, security and social policy.

Mr. Chairman, these are some of the opportunities and tests that await the next United States Ambassador to Guyana. I would welcome the opportunity to address them, and if confirmed, I will work diligently to strengthen bilateral cooperation and to advance U.S. interests in Guyana and the broader CARICOM region.

