

Statement by
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Ambassador-Designate to the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Before the Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is a privilege for me to appear before you today. I am honored by the confidence shown in me by President Bush and Secretary Powell by my nomination to be the United States Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. If confirmed by the Senate, I very much look forward to working with the members of this Committee and other Members of Congress to further our interests and strengthen our relations with the Congolese people.

I am well aware of the enormous problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but I believe that there has been very substantial progress made in the past two years. While the magnitude of the task to build a stable and prosperous Congo should not be underestimated, I believe neither should we underestimate the opportunities to build on this progress to achieve a Congolese success story. Certainly the size and importance of the Congo, and the regional impact of developments there calls for strong and committed efforts to achieve this success.

The history of the country is a troubled one and the Congolese people have suffered for much too long. Since 1996 in particular, open warfare involving many thousands of Congolese and other African troops has resulted in the death of an estimated 3.3 million people from fighting, disease, and privation, vast hardship for millions of Congolese, and incalculable economic destruction. The dreadful record of human rights abuses in the country, including shocking accounts of widespread sexual predation, has been documented in a variety of accounts. The tragedy created by this overall record now risks being compounded by an HIV/AIDS pandemic that threatens the very viability of whole societies in Africa and elsewhere in the world. A large nation, the Congo shares borders with nine other nations. Events there reach far beyond its borders, underscoring the importance of reversing the pattern of decline and destruction, building the institutions of durable democratic government, and fostering economic development to improve the lives of the Congolese people.

I am convinced that there is good reason for optimism. After enormous efforts by many in the region, and with strong support from the United States, other friendly nations, and the United Nations, a peace process was set in motion that has resulted in a Transitional Government of National Unity composed of former Congolese belligerents and other political parties. A strong United Nations presence including a major peacekeeping operation, MONUC, is helping to ensure the conditions needed for continued progress and a political process that leads to direct popular elections. The slow pace of full implementation of the December, 2002 Global and All-inclusive Agreement on the Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a major concern, but

there have been notable strides made toward the establishment of unified national government institutions for the entire nation and integrated security and military organizations. I believe there is now a better opportunity than has existed for many years to begin to attract commercial investment to the Congo to help realize the vast economic potential of the country.

While fully appreciative of the encouraging progress achieved to-date, I am also very aware of the magnitude of the daunting challenges remaining. There are urgent, large-scale humanitarian needs throughout the country, and relief efforts are hindered by a near-complete lack of infrastructure and frequently poor security conditions. Even basic education and health services are not available for a large percentage of the Congolese people, representing an urgent immediate crisis and a threat to Congo's future. If confirmed, I am committed to working in partnership with U.N. agencies and other donors, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to ensure that U.S. Government and other resources are utilized as effectively as possible to address these needs and establish the basis for long-term development.

To achieve sustainable progress in the Congo, it is critically important to maintain the momentum of the government transition plan, and the United States and other members of the International Committee to Support the Transition must continue to engage actively to encourage all Congolese parties to implement fully all aspects of the peace accords in force and the transition timetable leading to 2005 elections. Closely related, I believe it important for all concerned parties, including government agencies

and civil society, to do everything possible to establish viable institutions and procedures to ensure the rule of law in the Congo and directly address the many serious human rights issues affecting the Congolese people. As well, it is of obvious importance to bring economic development to the Congo, based on an active and healthy private sector along with associated capital investment to develop the Congolese economy and rebuild shattered infrastructure, begin to improve the well-being of its people, and bring opportunity and hope to all Congolese. Finally, it is crucial to continue to build as strong as possible an HIV/AIDS control program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as elsewhere to bring this horrendous threat under control throughout the region.

The United States has an interest in all of these areas, not simply on humanitarian grounds important as those are, but in the interests of contributing to a stable and prosperous large country strategically located in the heart of Central Africa. I know from firsthand experience that the Congo possesses abundant potential, in terms of both human and material resources, to achieve economic and political success. I also know that Ambassador Aubrey Hooks and the members of his Mission in Kinshasa have accomplished a great deal to help end conflict and move the Congo to a positive development track. If confirmed, I pledge that I will do my utmost to build on this record to ensure that all elements of the U.S. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo work actively with our friends in the region and beyond, and most importantly with the Congolese people, to contribute effectively to realize Congo's potential and achieve the political, economic, and development goals that I have identified.

I have been privileged to spend a good deal of my career in the Foreign Service associated with Africa, working in Africa as well as in Washington. My first African experience was as a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Sierra Leone, and from that time I have had the opportunity to work in a number of African countries in a variety of capacities, including the honor of representing the United States as Ambassador in Malawi from 2000 until last year. I have had several assignments related directly to Central Africa, including service as Deputy Chief of Mission in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, as Deputy Chief of Mission in Kinshasa from 1995 – 1998, and subsequently as Director of Central African Affairs at the Department of State in Washington. By virtue of these assignments, I have developed a strong appreciation of the complexities of the region, and familiarity with many of the key developments that have directly contributed to the present-day situation in the Congo and Great Lakes region. If confirmed by the Senate, I will draw on my experience, in collaboration with many excellent people in and outside of the U.S. Government, to address the major challenges that lie ahead in Kinshasa. I will do so, however, based on my firm conviction that progress in the country and region can be maintained and further strengthened.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee for the opportunity make this statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.