

Statement of Scott H. DeLisi  
Ambassador – designate to the State of Eritrea  
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

April 07, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next American Ambassador to the State of Eritrea. I am deeply grateful to President Bush and to Secretary Powell for their confidence and trust.

I would like, with the Committee's indulgence, to take a moment to acknowledge my wife Leija and our daughter Tjiama who are present here today, as well as our sons Joseph and Anthony who were not able to join us. For career officers, our families are central to our success and I know I would not be here today without their support and sacrifices over the years.

If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working with this Committee and with all those in Congress with an interest in Eritrea and the considerable challenges we face there. I believe that my 23-year career in

the State Department has prepared me well to respond to those challenges and to represent US interests effectively.

Turning to one of our greatest concerns in today's world, I note that Eritrea shares our determination to defend against the threat posed to all nations by terrorism. I also should note that Eritrea has supported US policy on Iraq, and has worked cooperatively with us on other aspects of the Global War on Terrorism. This is an important and appreciated partnership and one which we hope that we will be able to strengthen over time.

Recently, however, our serious concerns over human rights issues in Eritrea, coupled with differing perspectives over how the border demarcation issue between Eritrea and Ethiopia might best be resolved, have constrained that cooperation. If confirmed, I will make every effort to bring our relationship again to a point where our cooperation on counter-terrorism issues can be expanded and made more robust.

In my current position as Director for Southern African Affairs I have helped lead our efforts to restore democracy and respect for human rights to Zimbabwe, and I recognize the need for a committed, determined, long-term

approach to such challenges. I will bring the same commitment to my work with the Government of Eritrea if confirmed to the position of Ambassador there. Although we seek a close relationship with that government it cannot come at the expense of human rights, religious freedom and democratic governance. These concerns must form a central part of our dialogue and progress in these areas will be essential to building the stronger ties we seek.

Mr. Chairman, another area in which the United States has much it can offer Eritrea is in dealing with the tremendous devastation caused by the most recent war. The resettlement of displaced populations, the demobilization of an army of over 300,000 combatants, and the rebuilding of the economy would be a daunting task for any nation. Eritrea, however, as a chronically food-deficient country, faces the further challenge of just feeding its people.

Also, like much of the continent, Eritrea must cope with the threat of HIV/AIDS. Although the problem is not as widespread in Eritrea as in southern Africa, where as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Botswana I confronted it in one form or another almost daily, our assistance can be vital in helping Eritrea keep the threat under control. If confirmed, I look forward to leading our effort to assist the people of Eritrea as they build their nation

and to orchestrating, when needed, the provision of vital humanitarian support by our government.

Finally, the still unresolved border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia remains an area of significant concern. The U.S. government position remains clear and unequivocal: the decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, as agreed to in the Algiers Peace Accord, are final and binding on both parties and should be implemented without further delay. At the same time, however, both sides must understand that implementation of the Commission's demarcation decisions is only one of the steps on the path to enduring peace in the region. If confirmed by the Senate I will work determinedly to ensure that the additional steps necessary to normalize relations and to move from confrontation to cooperation are pursued.

Mr. Chairman, there are many issues and challenges for us to discuss with the government and people of Eritrea in addition to those highlighted in this statement. I can assure you that if confirmed by the Senate I will do all I can to strengthen the bilateral ties between our two nations while vigorously advancing our own national interests. Thank you for this opportunity to

appear before you this afternoon. I look forward to working with you during the confirmation process and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.