

Kerry Statement on Susan Rice Confirmation Hearing

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Incoming Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-Mass.) today released the following opening remarks for the confirmation hearing of Susan Rice, the President-Elect's designee to be Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations with the rank and status of Ambassador.

Full text as prepared is below:

The United States' Ambassador to the United Nations is one of the most important of our national security and diplomatic posts. The Obama Administration has recognized this by rightfully restoring it to Cabinet level. And I believe that President-elect Obama has made an outstanding choice in Dr. Susan Rice.

I have had the pleasure of working closely with Dr. Rice over the past years and I can tell you she is exceptionally talented, fiercely conscientious, and one of the most dedicated public servants I know. She has been a trusted personal advisor and friend, and I couldn't be happier than to welcome her here for confirmation to such a key position.

The choice of Dr Rice for this elevated position is further evidence of the Obama Administration's commitment to a renewed diplomatic and multilateral presence on the world stage.

The United Nations can play a crucial role in mobilizing the world to meet complex international issues that are critical to our national interests. From Iran's nuclear program to climate change to the crisis in Darfur and beyond, we are living in a world where the actions of a single nation are profoundly and increasingly inadequate to the challenges we face.

As I and others have said, if there were no United Nations, we would have to invent one. It is in our national and moral interest to cultivate a forum where frozen conflicts can be resolved before they become hot wars, where peace can be forged and protected, where global consensus on transnational threats and challenges can be translated into bold action, and where America can lead by working cooperatively with willing and able partners.

At its most effective, the UN can and will be vital to our interests. The world is changing. Narrower traditional notions of national interest are giving way to a broader, more holistic view—one that appreciates how the mass movements of people, melting ice caps, violent religious extremism, and global health challenges like HIV/AIDS are all interrelated facets of our security picture and deserve greater attention.

That is the world the next Administration inherits, and Dr. Rice brings a deep understanding to addressing these issues—in fact, her own writings and testimony on failed states and transnational challenges have helped to educate many of us about this new and inescapably global set of realities.

Dr. Rice brings insight and passion to an institution that will benefit from every bit of both. There have long been voices in our foreign policy debate that prefer to dwell on all that the United Nations is not, rather than how it does serve our interests today, or what it can become if we commit ourselves to strengthening it.

On the other hand, support for the UN must not lead us to whitewash the institution's shortcomings any more than we should accept blanket denunciations that diminish the good work of so many. In fact, support for the UN requires us to work to address legitimate flaws including corruption scandals, abuse by peacekeepers, and bureaucratic gridlock—not to mention a sometimes unbalanced approach to the Middle East and an unaccountable Human Rights Council.

Sometimes, working through the United Nations has proved frustrating when it comes to addressing humanitarian crises in places like Burma, Darfur, and Zimbabwe and threats like Iran's nuclear program. I look forward to hearing Dr. Rice's thoughts on how we can work to enhance the UN's ability to deal with each of these issues multilaterally.

But as we work toward making the UN a more effective and efficient body, we should not lose sight of the many ways in which it serves our interests. From managing over 90,000 peacekeepers in 16 missions around the world despite chronic underfunding, to providing food and shelter to the over 8 million refugees worldwide, to monitoring elections in Iraq, to much-needed coordination efforts in Afghanistan – the UN and its affiliated agencies take on issues that no nation can, or should, take on alone. And in many cases, it is the best equipped or the only multilateral institution capable of doing so.

The UN also advances important international norms that will benefit all nations. A UN panel of top scientists ratifies the world's consensus on the threat of climate change. The UN's championing of the core principles of nuclear nonproliferation—as well as the indispensable work of the IAEA in monitoring compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty—have significantly improved our security. And the UN also plays a critical role in advancing causes that everyone should be able to agree on: the fight against global hunger, global poverty, and for global health.

The United States' support for the UN is critical. We are the largest contributor to both the regular and the peacekeeping budgets, at 22 percent and 27 percent respectively. However, we are routinely behind in those payments, and the Administration's budget requests in recent years – particularly for peacekeeping – have not been enough to pay our bill. If we expect the United Nations to fulfill its important missions, we need to do better at upholding our end of the bargain—and that means paying our share in full and on time.

Representing America at a body as complex as the UN is an enormous challenge. I'm confident that Dr. Rice is up to it. She has served in senior positions on the National Security Council. And, as the youngest-ever Assistant Secretary of State, she was responsible for US policy toward 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, including 43 embassies, over 5000 foreign service employees, an operating budget of over \$100 million and a program budget of approximately \$160 million.

Dr. Susan Rice is one of our most capable national security thinkers. She understands that the US is strongest when we enlist others in our cause, share our burdens, and lead strategically.

It is my pleasure to support the nomination of a UN Ambassador who brings both a vital respect for the UN and the courage to challenge and improve it. I look forward to confirming her as our next Ambassador to the United Nations.