

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Nomination of
Susan Rice to be U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
January 15, 2009

I join Chairman Kerry in welcoming Dr. Susan Rice, who has been nominated to be Ambassador to the United Nations. This position is unique among diplomatic assignments in that its occupant is responsible not only for conducting diplomacy on many of the most critical foreign policy issues of the day, but also for U.S. stewardship of a multi-lateral institution that plays a central role in global affairs.

The diplomatic challenges that will face our nominee include the nuclear confrontations with Iran and North Korea; the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases; refugee crises related to Iraq, Darfur, and other locations; and numerous other problems that confront the United Nations every day.

While we all hope for a United Nations that can fulfill its potential as a forum for international problem-solving and dispute resolution, often the UN has fallen short of our hopes -- particularly in areas related to management, financial transparency, and oversight. The influence and capabilities possessed by the United Nations come from the credibility associated with countries acting together in a well-established forum with well-established rules. Scandals, mismanagement, and bureaucratic stonewalling squander this precious resource. This Committee and others in Congress have spent much time examining how the United States can work cooperatively with partners at the UN to streamline its bureaucracy, improve its transparency, and make it more efficient as it undertakes vital missions.

I recently read in the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal reports that the General Assembly shut down the U.N.'s Procurement Taskforce that was rooting out corrupt UN officials and had banned thirty-six international companies from further business with the United Nations. Regrettably, it appears that the U.N. has already begun to curtail or terminate many of the Taskforce's ongoing investigations.

Many barriers exist to successful UN reform. Too many diplomats and bureaucrats in New York see almost any structural or budgetary change at the U.N. as an attempt to diminish their prerogatives. Our next ambassador must be dedicated to continuing meaningful reform at the U.N. in spite of the daunting atmosphere. Our ambassador must be a forceful advocate for greater efficiency and transparency and an intolerance of corruption.

The performance of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva also continues to be a source of concern in the Congress and among the American people. Sessions of the Council have focused almost exclusively on Israel. Much less well-known is the role of the United Nations Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee in New York, which has voted in past years to condemn the deplorable human rights situations in Iran, North Korea, Belarus, and Burma -- countries which the Human Rights Council in Geneva has often ignored.

Despite these and other difficulties, the United Nations remains an essential component of global security policy. The World Health Organization and the World Food Program, for example, have performed vital functions, reduced U.S. burdens, and achieved impressive humanitarian results for many years. United Nations peacekeeping missions have contributed significantly to international stability and helped rebuild shattered societies. Currently, there are sixteen peacekeeping operations ranging from Haiti, to the Congo, to East Timor. Some 100,000 civilian, military and police forces from around the world are helping to stabilize some of the most war ravaged places on Earth. In 2008, there were 130 peacekeeping fatalities -- the second highest level since 1994.

The ability of U.N. peacekeeping missions to be a force-multiplier was underscored by a 2006 General Accounting Office analysis of the UN's peacekeeping mission in Haiti. The GAO concluded: "The U.N. budgeted \$428 million for the first 14 months of the mission. A U.S. operation of the same size and duration would have cost an estimated \$876 million." The report noted that the U.S. contribution to the Haiti peacekeeping mission was \$116 million – roughly one-eighth the cost of a unilateral American operation.

Most Americans want the United Nations to help facilitate international burden sharing in times of crisis. They want the UN to be a consistent and respected forum for diplomatic discussions. And they expect the UN to be a positive force in the global fight against poverty, disease, and hunger. But Americans also are frequently frustrated with the United Nations. The job of U.S. Ambassador to the UN involves not only dealing with policies and politics in New York. Our UN Ambassador must be able to communicate to Congress and the American people why it is important to pay our UN dues on time, why peacekeeping operations benefit the United States, and why cooperation at the UN is essential to U.S. foreign policy.

I welcome the distinguished nominee and look forward to hearing how she and the Obama Administration intend to address these important issues.

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