

Statement of Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa  
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Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Isakson and Members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today at this hearing: ***Examining the U.S Policy Responses to Entrenched African Leadership***.

Overall, I remain upbeat about trends in Africa, where I continue to see progress and note the recent good news coming out of Senegal and Malawi. Also I note the positive steps taken to address the bad news in Mali and in Guinea Bissau, with African countries unanimously demanding a return to civilian rule. All of these events are reminders that while progress in institutionalizing democracy is not always smooth and linear; democratization is the dominant trend around the continent.

As you are aware Mr. Chairman, this Administration is committed to a positive and forward looking policy in Africa. Indeed, we believe in Africa's potential and promise. While Africa has some very serious and well-known challenges, President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and I are confident that Africa and Africans will meet and overcome these challenges.

In order to underscore the importance that this Administration attaches to democracy, good governance and accountability, President Obama chose to make his inaugural Africa trip to Ghana. His speech in Accra applauded the efforts of Ghanaians to institutionalize democracy, noting that "... In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success -- strong parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges; an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people's everyday lives. Now, make no mistake: History is on the side of these brave Africans, not with those who use coups or change constitutions to stay in power. Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions."

In fact, our overarching Africa policy goal is to nurture the development of stable and democratic partners who are committed to the rule of law, human rights, transparent governance, and the welfare of their citizens. We believe that the long-

term strategy of supporting, strengthening and sustaining democratic institutions is already paying off. As a result, we plan to continue to prioritize funding for democracy programs which reinforce good governance and the rule of law, and promote participation of women and civil society.

We will also continue to work with the international community, including the Africa Union and African sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and others to strengthen democratic institutions and build upon the democratic gains made in recent years. We will continue to use every diplomatic tool at our disposal to nurture long-term progress.

### **CHALLENGES**

This brings us to the challenges at the heart of today's hearing. Africa has been making steady progress since the "democratic third wave" in the early 1990s. That progress continues today driven by the rising expectations of a younger generation which is fueling greater demands for economic and political change. More than 40 percent of the people living in Africa are under the age of 15 and nearly two thirds are under 30. This new generation is increasingly urbanized, well educated, plugged into the Internet and demanding greater transparency and democratic accountability from their leaders.

There exists a tension between the old and the new in sub-Saharan Africa today, where there are eleven (11) leaders who have been in power for 15 years or more; and of those, nine who have been in power for more than two decades.

Some of these leaders emerged during their countries' independence movements or times of armed conflict and see themselves as indispensable to their country's future. Indeed, some of these leaders see themselves as the embodiment of the state.

This dated desire to hold on to power conflicts with one of the most positive political trends in Africa over the last 20 years: the adoption of presidential term limits. Twenty-three African countries limit presidents to two terms in office. The introduction of terms limits has helped level the playing field and invigorated real political competition leading to opposition parties' power in a dozen countries.

The United States continues to encourage countries in Africa and elsewhere to respect executive term limits. Term limits encourage the development of new leadership and institutionalize a democratic process and permit new ideas and

policies to move forward. When democracy is threatened by strongmen trying to maintain their grip on power, we are not shy about making our views clear on the importance of term limits as you saw, most recently in Senegal when President Wade sought a third term.

We were deeply concerned that President Wade would throw his country into a constitutional or political crisis by seeking a constitutionally questionable third term, which he initially said he would not serve and which some of the country's most distinguished lawyers said was probably not legal. Although the advocacy efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, this did focus international attention on the conduct and outcome of this critical election. Ultimately, the Senegalese voters rejected Wade's bid at the ballot box and demonstrated, unequivocally, that strong men are trumped by an engaged electorate, an active civil society and strong institutions.

Former President Wade's third term bid is emblematic of a troubling counter-trend. In the last nine years, the governments of seven sub-Saharan countries have repealed the two-term limits on the presidency (Chad, Gabon, Togo, Cameroon, Guinea, Niger and Uganda). Niger has since reinstated term limits. Presidents in other countries, including Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to repeal term limits.

The repeal of term limits raises questions about process as well as outcome. Self-interested governments proposed changes which benefited sitting presidents who then use their control of the state to assure their re-elections. Weak judicial and legislative branches approve changes in the constitution giving the changes a veneer of legality. The resulting elections are often meaningless, pro-forma exercises that only serve to legitimize the long-standing status quo, a phenomenon that the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa (EISA) calls "electoral autocracy." Such leaders have embraced the language of democracy, but not its full meaning.

To be blunt, some African governments lack the will to conduct free and fair elections in which they might lose political and economic power. Instead they rig the system by monopolizing the media, harassing opposition figures, and otherwise closing political space. On a continent where most political and economic power still resides in the State, elections are too often viewed as a zero sum game in which all spoils go to the winner.

## **CONSEQUENCES**

Electoral autocracy has numerous negative consequences, captured in the data in international reports and studies compiled by Freedom House, the Mo Ibrahim Index, Transparency International, and the World Bank, among others. Most reveal a variety of problems including corruption, a lack of accountability, crony capitalism, and nepotism. These elements feed a rent-seeking class of well-connected elites who maintain a stranglehold on local economies. This behavior crowds out legitimate local entrepreneurs and fuels large disparities in income and opportunity. This can breed anger, resentment and even violence, as we have seen in the countries impacted by the Arab Spring.

## **STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE**

The political and economic success of Africa depends a great deal on the effectiveness, sustainability, and reliability of its democratic institutions. That means a focus on process and progress, not personalities. African leaders must recognize that the United States is engaged in building long-term ties with their people and not just with them. Credible, strong, and independent institutions are the key to both a deeper relationship with the United States and to their long-term success.

We will continue to support efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and participation, including in countries with entrenched leadership. Specifically, we will focus on supporting good governance, strengthening parliaments, and increasing the efficiency of judicial systems, and we will continue to provide assistance to encourage civic participation, so that young people get involved, and to fund concrete solutions to corruption such as forensic accounting to advance transparency and accountability. We believe economic development programs help build democratic institutions as well, because an empowered citizenry is the foundation of every strong democracy.

Our Africa policy is built on anticipating that change is inevitable and that it can best be channeled through constructive action rather than destructive reaction. We have the same value-based discussions with all African leaders, during which we highlight our views about the importance of building strong democratic institutions, good governance, accountability and the role of civil society. Clearly there are countries where governments are more receptive and, indeed, responsive to that message. But that message is a consistent part of policy and outreach in all African countries.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of our policy, we have a number of tools at our disposal. Our best tools are generally positive and often rest on trying to convince leaders that strengthening core democratic institutions are in the long-term interest of the country and could be an important part of their historical legacies.

When the situation warrants it we can use public criticism, and more punitive measures such as diplomatic isolation, financial and diplomatic sanctions including travel bans. We have used sanctions with limited success on entrenched leaders in Sudan, Eritrea and Zimbabwe. The results, frankly speaking, indicate that sanctions are not necessarily a silver bullet, but they do send an important message.

In our increasingly multi-lateral world new tools are emerging. But the most important voices supporting democracy are coming from Africans. This was evident, for example, recently when the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS strongly denounced the coup in Mali, sanctioned the military junta, and demanded an immediate return to civilian rule. ECOWAS was also quick to make a forthright statement denouncing the military takeover in Guinea-Bissau last week and demanding a return to democratic rule. We would like to build on this, for example by working with the AU in supporting implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The use of these and other tools we have furthered the long-term efforts to build strong African institutions. This can happen even in countries with entrenched leaders. But this is a long-term strategy. Realistically, in some places, it may take years before we see results. Democratization is a process and lasting substantive change does not happen overnight; it is generational. There is no simple recipe for change and reform, but consistent direct exchange provides a solid foundation on which we can base our actions.

The case studies of Senegal and Cameroon are indicative of these long-term challenges. Many of the strategies we just noted are those we pursued in both of these countries. In Senegal, our efforts contributed to a positive outcome. While we and the rest of the international community can take some of the credit, the Senegalese themselves bravely demonstrated their commitment to democracy. That commitment paid off. In the case of Cameroon, the hard work continues, but we are no less optimistic that our consistent efforts and those of the Cameroonians themselves will eventually pay off. Let me offer a few details of each case.

## CASE STUDIES

### SENEGAL

Our two countries share a longstanding commitment to democracy, good governance, and economic development. There has been a historical pattern of peaceful transitions of power through the ballot box in Dakar. The Senegalese take great pride in preserving the democratic values of their country, as evident by the coalition of opposition and civil society groups that formed to protest ex-President Wade's proposed constitutional amendments to election rules (which the government withdrew). We repeatedly encouraged and applauded the Senegalese people for their enthusiasm, patience, and civic engagement in making the election process as smooth as possible.

While we respected Senegal's political and legal processes, we were concerned that President Wade's insistence on running for a constitutionally-questionable third term could precipitate a crisis that might spark civil unrest and unravel his achievements.

Wade's insistence on running for a third term also set a poor example for the spirit of democracy and good governance in the region. Especially since the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact signing ceremony in September 2009, we have tried to make clear to President Wade that democracy is government "by the people, of the people, and for the people," which includes the right and ability of citizens to choose, participate in, and lead their governments—not merely a game of elections and candidates. We encouraged President Wade to put the interest of Senegal above his own personal interest to solidify his stature as a respected elder statesman.

Senegal's civic and religious institutions proved to be a major positive force. We repeatedly met religious and civic leaders and NGOs, who assured us of their intent to support principles of good governance, and to encourage their membership to participate actively but peacefully in the political process. The role of the overwhelming majority of religious leaders in remaining impartial or nonpartisan arguably made the greatest contribution to a successful process.

With a long history in international peacekeeping and participation in the international coalition for "Operation Desert Storm" in the early 1990's, Senegal's security services are among the most professional in Africa. State and DoD engaged them often, and they guaranteed they would maintain their unquestioned

reputation for abiding by civilian authority and the rule of law. We congratulate them for their professional conduct.

It was important that the USG collaborated with the international community in presenting a united front, particularly on election observation. Former Nigerian President Obasanjo led 200 observers from the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The European Union (EU) deployed over 120 observers. We allocated \$850,000 in funding in FY 2011 to train and support 1,400 independent election observers, deployed through non-partisan Senegalese organizations.

Also, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization worked with the Africa Bureau and U.S. Embassy Dakar to develop an elections observation plan for both rounds of voting, analysis of the elections landscape, and planning around different contingencies for both rounds and potential outcomes.

In the end, international observers and the Senegalese themselves judged the elections to be a credible expression of the will of the Senegalese people. Clearly this was a victory for Senegal, which has retained its democratic credentials and remains at the vanguard of democratic nations in Africa. Indeed, this may turn out to be a watershed moment in the history of democracy in Africa. With the eyes of the whole continent watching, the Senegalese demonstrated, unequivocally, that strong men are trumped by an engaged electorate, an active civil society and strong institutions.

## **CAMEROON**

Originally a single party state, since 1990 Cameroon has had a multiparty system of government with over 250 political parties today. However, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. On October 9, 2011, CPDM Chairman Paul Biya won reelection as president, a position he has held since 1982.

With the largest economy in Central Africa and historically the sub-region's most stable country, Cameroon presents a dilemma for U.S. engagement. On the one hand, it abounds with potential from its natural resources, geographic location, climatic diversity, and rich soil. On the other hand, its relative prosperity and system of patronage has resulted in an entrenched leadership, tight restrictions on the political space of opposition groups and an absence in transparency in political and economic activities. These policies have placed a premium on maintaining the status quo in lieu of embarking on reform.

Our engagement with Cameroon has made some progress. The National Assembly passed an anti-human trafficking law and the judiciary convicted several child traffickers. The government presented a penal code that improves the rights of women, children, and detainees. The Cameroonian military intervened to deter elephant poaching and maritime piracy. Cameroon voted alongside us and even co-sponsored resolutions with us at the UN. And, as I will detail shortly, President Biya has made some efforts to improve electoral processes.

The 2011 Presidential election was flawed by irregularities, including the failure to properly distribute all voter cards, late opening of polling stations, multiple voting, ballot-box stuffing, the absence of indelible ink, and intimidation of voters. Citizens residing overseas registered and voted for the first time. After the election the Supreme Court received 20 complaints from political parties, ten of which demanded either the partial or complete annulment of results due to irregularities. On October 19, the court dismissed all the cases for lack of evidence or late submission.

Given Cameroon's political history, the USG has focused its policy on finding ways to influence the Cameroonian government to adopt political reforms. We made our views on the 2008 Constitutional revisions, which led to elimination of term limits, clear both privately to President Biya and in public comments. In fact, on March 7 and 8, 2008, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs James Swan visited Yaoundé to convey our displeasure with the



constitutional change and the handling of the political violence in a one-on-one meeting with President Biya.

At our urging and in consultation with us, the European Union and several other foreign missions issued a public statement urging more inclusive public debate on the constitutional amendment.

In 2009 we met with government, civil society and opposition parties and then worked with other diplomatic missions to boycott the swearing-in of the stacked election commission (Elections Cameroon or ELECAM), simultaneously issuing a statement expressing our displeasure with its composition. In 2011, we financed and launched two ongoing civil society strengthening programs – one of which led to the creation of the Civil Society Forum for Democracy, which has become one of Cameroon's leading democracy advocacy organizations. We also worked with youth and women to encourage participation in politics and get out the vote.

I visited Cameroon in June 2011, met with President Biya, Prime Minister Yang, other Ministers, opposition leaders, and civil society to urge a transparent election. In July 2011, Cameroon added six civil society and opposition members to ELECAM and gave Cameroonians residing abroad the right to vote. In October 2011, after extensive election observation and consultations, our Ambassador gave a strong speech identifying lessons learned from the election and ways to improve. I subsequently wrote to Biya urging the re-establishment of term limits, the implementation of stalled constitutional reforms and a more transparent and independent electoral commission.

This year, we have worked with other diplomatic missions and sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister suggesting possible improvements in the electoral process. Following our Embassy's most recent public and private comments, the Government announced its decision to create a new voter roll based on biometric voter cards, addressing a problem that has plagued previous elections, and to harmonize the various election laws in a single new electoral code. I have laid out some of our concerns in a letter this month to President Biya, as Cameroon's National Assembly considers the revised electoral code.

So although there is more work to do in Cameroon, and indeed the institutionalization of democracy is in its nascent stages, we are seeing signs of a revitalized civil society, increasingly energized political debate and ultimately

more government engagement about how the country can deepen its commitment to reform and chart out a more democratic future.

And with that, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.