

**Testimony of
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Bureau of African Affairs
U.S. Department of State
before the
House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and
International Organizations
Democracy Support Strategies in Africa
May 18, 2016**

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify on democracy support strategies for Africa and our ongoing work with our African and other international partners to support democratic transitions and opportunities for progress. Unfortunately, while the people and governments of Africa have made significant strides in recent years, they and we must still contend with and address the challenges associated with backsliding and closing political space. Over the next few minutes, I would like to talk about both the progress that’s been made and where more – sometimes much more – still needs to be done.

The United States has long been and remains committed to partnering with the people and governments of Africa to promote democracy, human rights and good governance. Strengthening democratic institutions at all levels is in fact the first pillar of President Obama’s 2012 Presidential Policy Directive for Africa, and it is a priority reflected in the President’s budget requests for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) programs over the past several years, culminating in an FY 2017 request of more than \$343 million, which is 50% above the 2015 initial actual level. However, appropriated funding for DRG in Africa, within the global context of other priorities, has been constrained, which has made it difficult to sustain some of the democratic gains in and counter some of the backsliding in Africa.

Africa is home to the world’s youngest and fastest growing population, which presents significant opportunities for transformation and growth as well as significant challenges. In this past year, there have been political openings and

electoral successes— including in countries ranging in size from Cabo Verde to Nigeria, and including Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Benin. I have personally had the honor of being part of the U.S. delegations to several presidential inaugurations. Others in the Administration, including members of the President’s cabinet, have led delegations to similar events – evidence of the importance of democratic gains not only to the people of Africa, but also to the United States.

An election, though, is neither the beginning nor the end of democracy. Even a democratically elected and duly inaugurated leader may choose to ignore constitutional limitations on terms of office, manipulate the electoral process to personal or party advantage, or impose restrictions on political space to silence legitimate opposition. It’s important, therefore, that the United States and our partners not take anything for granted, but remain vigilant and continue the policies and programs that will foster long-term legitimate governance and democratic institutionalization.

With this in mind, the Bureau of African Affairs, along with our colleagues in other bureaus and agencies, employs a wide range of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic advocacy, foreign assistance programs, and other tools to promote and advance human rights and democracy. My colleagues from USAID and State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, which administer many of these programs, will address these in greater detail.

The Link Between Instability and Democracy

Democracy is a laudable goal, but it cannot and does not happen overnight. Hurdles and challenges including instability, insecurity, corruption, inequality and terrorism stand in democracy’s way. This is a primary reason that from Mali to Burundi, and South Sudan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we are engaged in aggressive diplomatic and assistance efforts to help resolve conflicts, implement peace agreements, support elections, promote inclusive politics, and prevent backsliding.

In Mali, we continue to urge all sides to accelerate their efforts to implement the peace accord signed in June 2015. Significant implementation delays have

prolonged the security vacuum in northern Mali, making it difficult to advance reconciliation, reintegration, and development. Despite these obstacles, we remain committed to advancing an inclusive peace through dialogue with all actors, security sector reform and stabilization, and support to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

In the Central African Republic (CAR), the recent peaceful election of President Touadéra and ongoing democratic transition are positive steps, but sustained international interest and attention are essential to ending the cycle of violence and putting the country on a path towards long-term stability and security. Working bilaterally and with international partners such as the UN, AU, and EU, we are supporting inclusive, representative, human-rights-based approaches to governance that facilitate post-conflict stabilization and recovery. Rule of law and accountability are essential for CAR's future, and we are helping to build CAR's judicial structure, including the development of its Special Criminal Court. We are also working to help citizens throughout CAR, regardless of ethnic or religious background, by focusing our long-term development programming on community-level peace and reconciliation and expanding access to justice through sexual and gender-based violence legal training and mobile courts. As I said at the outset, an election and inauguration are a good start, but citizens need to know they can have confidence in their governments to govern them justly and well.

The story in Burundi hasn't been nearly as promising, and we are continuing to employ diplomatic engagement at all levels to urge support for the East African Community-led regionally-mediated dialogue, which we continue to believe presents the best route for peacefully resolving the conflict. We are hopeful that the repeatedly delayed dialogue will resume on May 21 in Arusha, Tanzania, and we continue to encourage all stakeholders to participate without pre-conditions or redlines. We have also encouraged accountability for abuses and violations of human rights and attempts to undermine democracy in Burundi by sanctioning eight individuals thus far from both sides of the conflict. Former Congressman Thomas Perriello, the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, has made frequent visits to Burundi, DRC, and other countries in the region, seeking diplomatic solutions to the current crisis in Burundi and to the impending crisis in the DRC, and will attend the dialogue in Arusha.

In the DRC, we are committed to supporting timely, credible, and peaceful elections, which should culminate in the country's first democratic transition in executive power. This milestone would go a long way in solidifying the country's fragile progress towards stability, democratization, and development over the past decade. We are very concerned, however, by President Kabila's increasing efforts to stay in office beyond his constitutional term limit, including delaying elections and overseeing increased repression against civil society and opposition leaders. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported a significant increase in repression in 2015 and a more rapid increase in repressive acts in the first months of 2016. If the DRC goes down the road of Burundi, the resulting instability could be significantly worse, with far more wide-spread consequences for the region.

The highest levels of the U.S. government are engaged in ensuring that the voices of the Congolese people determine the future of Congo. President Obama has called President Kabila, and Secretary Kerry has met with him on a number of occasions – most recently on April 22– to underscore the importance of timely elections and a transition in leadership. We continue to engage with all stakeholders about the electoral process, including on the prospect for a technical dialogue to reach consensus on next steps. In addition, we have stated privately and publicly that the United States is prepared to impose targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for human rights violations. We have an existing sanctions regime for the DRC, which includes the authority to sanction individuals responsible for undermining democratic institutions as well. We will continue to do everything we can to support democracy in this country, which plays such a pivotal role in the stability and economic development of Central Africa.

Success Stories

As daunting as those challenges might sound, it's important to recognize some of the many successes of the past year.

Nigeria's 2015 elections were an historic moment not just for Nigeria but for the entire continent. People showed up early to vote, stayed late to ensure their votes were counted, and ultimately elected a new government -- the first peaceful,

democratic transfer of power to an opposition party in Nigerian history. U.S.-Nigerian relations are stronger than they have been in many years, and we continue to strengthen this partnership by collaborating to address our shared priorities, including by helping Nigeria defeat Boko Haram and improve security, fight corruption, and promote economic growth. We recognize and stand ready to support Nigeria's strong commitments this month at the UK Anti-Corruption Summit on beneficial ownership, fiscal and tax transparency, asset recovery, and open contracting.

The November 2015 election in Burkina Faso was peaceful, transparent, and considered credible by all participants. This commendable outcome was not always certain, however. Just three months earlier, the presidential guard attempted to seize power, holding the transitional president and prime minister hostage. But the Burkinabe would not accept this and raised their voices for democracy. They worked with civil society, religious leaders, and the international community to restore the transitional government and hold elections. Over the past two years the Burkinabe people have repeatedly demonstrated their strong commitment to democracy in the face of adversity, and we have consistently stood by them. Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield led our delegation to Ouagadougou for President Kabore's inauguration in December, and we look forward to working with his government and Burkinabe people to advance our partnership.

Benin's March 2016 election was deemed credible by international observers. Over the past 25 years, the Beninese people and their leaders have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to the democratic process. This election, once again, proved the strength and vibrancy of Benin's democracy. Former President Boni Yayi deserves great credit for the orderly and timely transition to President Talon, as does former Prime Minister Zinsou, whom President Talon defeated in the election, and whose respect for the election results was a superb example of leadership and support for democracy.

Peaceful Transition and Promoting Good Governance and Civil Society

The countries I just discussed – both the successes and the continuing challenges – are just a sample of those with ongoing or impending democratic transitions. No fewer than 16 African countries have national elections this year, with several others holding local or municipal votes as well. We will continue to support regular democratic transitions of power, which means, among other things, that we do not support those in power changing constitutions purely as a means of extending their own tenure: this undermines the institutions of democracy, the legitimacy of governance, and the democratic process. We believe regular democratic transitions provide opportunities for Africans to participate in the political process and hold their governments accountable, while contributing to stability across the continent. As President Obama said in his historic address to the African Union (AU) last year, "Sometimes you'll hear leaders say, 'Well, I'm the only person who can hold this nation together.' If that's true, then that leader has failed to truly build their nation."

Successful leaders work to foster the development of a strong civil society and institutions that can support the peaceful transitions of power; that is the way to long-term stability. When electoral events are successful and democratic, they also help prevent feelings of injustice and alienation that can lead some to heed the siren call of extremism and violence. We support programs to counter violence and promote reconciliation, working with leaders from diverse political, religious, and ethnic groups to promote tolerance, respect, and reform. Working with local and international human rights groups, the United States identifies, prevents and counters violence against women and marginalized communities, including LGBTI persons. All of these efforts, in one way or another, feed into the larger goal of helping the people and countries of Africa build a more democratic future.

We've seen some major electoral successes, but there have been setbacks as well. Solid democratic governance is not simply about elections, and therefore we will continue to promote respect for universal human rights, support civil society, and fight corruption. And we are working with our African partners to ensure that governments deliver essential services, independent judiciaries enforce the rule of law, and that professional security forces respect human rights. Through the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), we are partnering with six initial countries - including Mali -to strengthen African processes and institutions so they more

effectively and efficiently answer the needs for citizen security. Through SGI, we work closely with African parliaments and civil societies so that African militaries and police can be more accountable, respectful of the rule of law, and are able to sustain themselves to carry out their functions under democratically elected governments.

The United States is also committed to supporting the Open Government Partnership (OGP), of which ten African countries are currently members. Through OGP, governments partner and build trust with civil society to work together to make governments and government services more accountable, participatory, and transparent. African countries in OGP are working with civil society to promote reform, and are embracing tools such as open budgeting, open contracting, open data and access to information to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. Nigeria announced its intention to join this month at the UK Anti-Corruption Summit, where countries recognized the role OGP can play in furthering anti-corruption efforts. This year, South Africa has played a global leadership role as the OGP co-chair, and we have seen other African countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia embrace OGP as a mechanism for reforms by building new platforms for good governance initiatives and engaging with civil society in collaborative ways.

The United States seeks to strengthen the legal framework and management practices for democratic governance to improve governments' capacity to respond to citizens. U.S.-funded programs strengthen the capacity of electoral institutions, support improved political processes, increase awareness of civic responsibilities, encourage nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide civic education and citizen advocacy, and encourage citizen participation in governance. We call upon all governments to respect and uphold their citizens' fundamental freedoms of speech, association, and expression. And when we see that a government is failing to defend these rights – or, in the worst cases, is actively preventing its citizens from exercising them – we make known our displeasure, loudly and clearly.

The Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and USAID work closely with our embassies to assess risks for violence surrounding key upcoming African elections, so that diplomatic and programmatic

efforts can mitigate these risks. CSO has also worked directly with local government stakeholders. For example, in the run-up to Nigeria's 2015 elections, CSO deployed an electoral security advisor to work with the country's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and enhance its electoral violence prevention efforts in coordination with USAID and its partners.

The Critical Role of Women

A key element of U.S. action in promoting more democratic and inclusive societies is the advancement of the status of women and girls. As the Secretary of State has said, "our goal is as simple as it is profound: to empower half the world's population as equal partners in preventing and resolving conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, violence, and insecurity." When women actively participate at all levels of political decision-making, we know that we are all safer, that our efforts at peacebuilding are stronger, and that around the world, constitutions and peace agreements are more inclusive, just, and lasting. This is not a notion or an idea; it is a fact.

But women in Africa continue to face – and fight to overcome – systemic obstacles to their political participation in all levels of decision-making. For example, women parliamentarians in Kenya have amplified their voice and influence through training sponsored by the Department of State. To comply with the country's 2/3 gender rule, many women are nominated, rather than elected, to serve in their county assemblies. As a result, they are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes by elected members. However, after receiving leadership, media, and advocacy training, the women have used the skills they have learned to resolve conflict within their political parties and caucuses; utilize radio and social media to discuss issues such as domestic violence; and effectively mobilize grassroots support to develop constituencies that will increase their chances of winning in the next election. As one participant stated, "Only when you are trained do you realize you are capable of doing the work."

The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security outlines commitments to ensure women's participation in peace negotiations and reconstruction, protect women and children from conflict abuse, and address the

needs of women in disaster response. It seeks to empower women and girls as equal partners in preventing conflict, as well as to ensure their representation in peacemaking and protect them from violence. The United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally is complementary in scope and serves to marshal U.S. expertise and capacity to address gender-based violence. The Strategy represents a multi-sector approach that includes the justice, legal, security, health, education, economic, social services, humanitarian, and development sectors.

Public Diplomacy Tools

U.S. assistance funds programs for civil society monitoring of government activities, including programming to promote and protect independent media coverage of elections, and improve political party organization. We also develop civil society capacity to further democracy and human rights. These programs strengthen the ability of civil society organizations to influence governments on behalf of citizens, increase accountability and transparency, advocate for political reform, build partnerships with public and private sectors, and promote more inclusive societies.

We also employ public diplomacy tools such as the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), among others. YALI in particular has already been developing the next generation of African leaders who are steeped in democratic, humanitarian values and who are building programs and policies in their home countries that will bear fruit for years to come. Separately, the Fulbright and Humphrey Fellowship programs allow us to bring promising, up-and-coming African students and professionals to the United States for professional development, networking, and practical work experiences to assist in capacity building in critical areas such as good governance and human rights. We also provide funding to prepare foreign university-level students for leadership roles, and fund speakers on democracy-related issues. The Voice of America, individual embassy public affairs programming, and interviews and op-eds by senior Department of State officials, including the Secretary, have helped magnify our pro-democracy messaging across Africa.

Conclusion

We appreciate the Committee's interest in addressing the need to support democracy in Africa and again ask for your help in supporting our relevant funding requests. How we allocate funds is a reflection of how we define our priorities, and we believe there is no higher priority than continuing and expanding Africa's democratic growth. We know that the challenges are great, but we believe that the comprehensive approach that we are pursuing is making progress and promoting democracy, human rights and good governance that will ultimately benefit the United States and all of Africa. This will be a long-term process that requires persistence and sustained partnerships. With your help we have made significant strides over the past few years, but more work remains to be done.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.