

Testimony

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Zeldin, and distinguished members of the subcommittee for inviting me to discuss the Department's efforts to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce that truly reflects America. I would like to emphasize that these issues are of great personal significance to me, and I've worked to advance them in my 17 months on the job as Director General. Yet never in my almost 33-year career have I seen such passion on the part of employees, of all backgrounds, for creating an environment where we are listening to each other as a community as I have over the past two months.

Like our nation, our workforce has been rattled by the pain of long-standing wounds and the opening of new ones with the horrific killing of George Floyd. We're at an inflection point in our nation's history, the history of our Service, and the Department. The Department is part of the broader fabric of American society, and like our nation, the Department must acknowledge its own checkered history. We are not exempt from the racial and social justice challenges that our nation has experienced since its inception. Women, Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, People of Color, and LGBTQ Americans, among others, have fought valiantly for the opportunity to serve our country in the Foreign Service and, more broadly, at the Department.

Thanks to the efforts of courageous employees, Congressional support, and the advent of our Pickering Fellowship in the 1990s and the Rangel Fellowship a decade later, we've made important advances. But we remain a work in progress, and we still have work to do before we fully represent America. I am here today because we are committed to strengthening our efforts to make that promise a reality. As Secretary Pompeo has noted, “the composition of our State Department workforce reflects America’s devotion to the principle of equal opportunity... [O]ur teams work diligently to find the best, most committed and broadly diverse talent to deliver excellence in American diplomacy.” This is why the State Department accepted the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report recommendation from January 2020: to take additional steps to identify potential barriers to equal opportunity in our workforce. We will submit our plan to GAO in the requisite 180 days.

Mr. Chairman, today, I would like to share with you and the members of the subcommittee what we are doing to respond to the GAO report and reflect our increasing diversity and to create a culture in which every individual feels valued, respected, and able to contribute fully to our mission. A culture of inclusion can take us from understanding diversity to valuing and successfully leveraging it to create high-performing teams. This is not just a moral imperative. It is also a

strategic imperative: inclusion is essential to harnessing the best from all our teams to address new challenges at a time of growing global complexity and competition. Our diverse, highly talented workforce is an invaluable comparative advantage and we must unleash its potential.

With that as our north star, in January, the Under Secretary for Management launched a Department-wide taskforce to draft our Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan (DISP) for 2020-2022. The DISP, which we hope to finalize and release this fall, will offer a cohesive and comprehensive vision to steer the Department's diversity and inclusion efforts over the next two years. For the first time, it reflects the input of over 40 bureaus and contributions from Employee Affinity Groups (16), including one of our newest: the Pickering and Rangel Fellows Association. It covers a shorter time-frame than is usually the case in order to synch the next DISP with the Department's 2022-2026 Joint Strategic Plan's (JSP) timeline, ensuring that our diversity and inclusion work is formally embedded in the Department's strategic goals. We do this so that bureaus and missions have better alignment and consistency in how our operating units execute these lines of effort. My team looks forward to briefing the Committee once the plan is final.

I would now like to talk in more detail about our diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts in three critical areas—recruitment, retention, and accountability.

Recruitment

Recruitment for diversity is a top strategic priority. The Department purposefully recruits for diverse talent through our national talent acquisition platform, which strategically places recruiters across the country to seek competitive applicants from all backgrounds and focuses on those groups that are underrepresented at the Department. Recruiters target university campuses with diverse student populations, cultivate relationships with professional associations, and engage with communities. They maintain contacts with aspiring diplomats at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), Hispanic serving institutions (HSI) and tribal colleges and universities, among other places. They recruit skilled professionals through alumni networks, trade organizations, and in communities. They also meet candidates where they are—which for the modern job seeker is online. The State Department has long had an online presence and has dramatically and successfully increased its virtual recruitment activities in consideration of the current public health circumstances.

Thousands of Americans pursue a career in diplomacy each year, and the State Department has several programs designed specifically to make a foreign affairs career accessible to competitive individuals from historically under-represented groups. The Pickering and Rangel Fellowships, the U.S. Foreign

Service Internship Program, and the Foreign Affairs Information Technology Fellowship are programs that support the recruitment of diverse talent for Department careers.

Since their inception, the highly competitive Pickering and Rangel Fellowships have brought hundreds of talented employees to our ranks, many from backgrounds historically underrepresented at the Department. In aggregate, the Fellowships have enhanced the diversity of Foreign Service Generalists, increasing minority representation from 17% to 22%. Indeed, recruitment efforts have succeeded in doubling interest in the two programs over the past several years, as reflected in approximately 800 candidates for the 30 fellowships in each program in 2019 and 2020. Recognizing the Fellowships' success in attracting top talent and creating a workforce that better represents the diversity of the nation, the Department is increasing the number of Fellows by 50%, from 60 to 90 Fellows per year starting with the 2021 cohort, which will be selected this fall.

Recruitment is the foundation of all our efforts to create a workforce that reflects our nation's diversity and leverages this diversity to advance America's foreign policy priorities in every corner of the world. Our recruitment platform designs activities aligned with specific strategic objectives, and the Department will

ensure that its comprehensive recruitment vision aligns with DISP objectives covering all employment categories.

Retention

To stand the test of time and, thus, translate into a Department that looks more like America, effective strategic recruitment must be accompanied by internal cultural shifts that enable retention and ultimately career advancement. This is why I've made fostering a culture of inclusion a priority from day one. Under the leadership of Deputy Assistant Secretary Mirembe Nantongo, the Bureau of Global Talent Management's Diversity and Inclusion Unit has worked with the Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR) to coordinate efforts across the organization, engaging Employee Affinity Groups and supporting the creation of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Councils in bureaus and offices here at home and at our missions overseas.

In the wake of the George Floyd killing, the Department has seen increased employee interest in creating space for difficult conversations around inclusion and on the challenges our Black and other minority colleagues face in both personal and professional spaces. We have worked closely with S/OCR to facilitate a robust, open dialogue aimed at fostering change in our institutional culture and identifying concrete steps for those interested in being allies on these issues. This "Open

Conversations” initiative encourages dialogue and gives employees a safe forum to discuss sensitive issues.

Research increasingly suggests a strong correlation between retention and workplace flexibility. The Department—and I personally—are deeply grateful to Congress for the enactment of the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (FEPLA) of 2020. As I noted when I came before this Committee last summer, it is an important boost to our retention efforts, and we are committed to its full implementation.

There is much work to be done to make today’s Department more flexible and accommodating. With the strong support of the Under Secretary for Management, over the past year, I have introduced new workplace flexibilities within my authority and enhanced existing ones to maximize the performance, career development, and professional satisfaction of employees. Some of these initiatives include an extended Leave Without Pay pilot program, additional lactation rooms, flexible lunch schedules, and a push to make more positions telework-eligible. The pandemic has demonstrated to skeptics that telework does not diminish employee productivity. I am hopeful that managers will continue to make use of this option for telework-eligible employees once the pandemic abates. And I intend to do everything in my power as Director General to walk the walk within my own bureau.

While our attrition rates of approximately 4 percent remain lower than the government average, retention requires that we look closely and systematically at why some employees decide to leave the Department. To that end, we have launched a new centralized exit survey that will help identify potential patterns so we can better address systemic issues as part of our retention efforts. We have also extended a pilot program for gender-neutral, anonymous Meritorious Service Increase nominations that began in 2019 so we can get a more comprehensive data set for our impact analysis.

Many of us have been the beneficiaries of mentors who helped us grow personally and professionally and develop the confidence to take on greater responsibilities. I, for one, would not be here without the support I received from two remarkable mentors. The Department has active mentoring programs for Foreign and Civil Service employees. The Leadership and Management School at the Foreign Service Institute also offers a robust coaching program available to all employees. But we are always looking for ways to do better. And we are committed to strengthening our mentoring programs and critically examining whether they adequately address the issues and concerns of employees of color.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not mention our 50,000 Locally Employed Staff in the context of strengthening inclusion. They are the mainstay of

our U.S. diplomatic operations abroad and sometimes incur great risks working with and for the United States. We continue to look at ways to ensure we can attract and retain the best local talent.

Career Advancement

While it is the responsibility of individual employees to track their respective career paths in a manner that is right for them and allows them to reach their full potential, it is the Department's responsibility to build the framework that will enable them to get there. Ultimately, we want high-performing employees of all backgrounds to have an equal opportunity to rise up the ranks and assume the leadership mantle. So, we have begun to look closely at areas of concern identified in the GAO report to identify possible barriers to ascension for mid-level employees in both the Foreign Service and the Civil Service.

Accountability

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to turn to the subject of accountability. Accountability begins with the tone and example set by leadership. Department leaders have reaffirmed our commitment to fairness and non-discrimination and have encouraged employees to speak up against discrimination and ensure it has no place in our ranks. Both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary have reiterated their commitment to diversity and inclusion. In his

June 1 message to the workforce, the Deputy Secretary strongly encouraged employees to take unconscious bias training, noting that he had enrolled in the course offered by our Foreign Service Institute (FSI).

The Department takes unconscious bias seriously and has taken several major steps to raise employees' awareness of bias and to mitigate its effects on Department-wide procedures. Efforts to tackle unconscious bias need to be broad and encompass recruitment, hiring, performance evaluation and task allocation. In 2019, FSI launched "Mitigating Unconscious Bias" (PT144), initially available in the classroom and then also made available in a distance learning version to our global workforce since November 2019. Since that date, more than 10,000 employees have taken the course. . We also are mindful of the desire for the course to be mandatory. Rather than turning the course into a box checking exercise, we are including this training in our Foreign Service and Civil orientation courses and requiring the course as a prerequisite for our leadership courses while also encouraging supervisors to discuss implications of the course locally and in a way that is relevant to their team.

Accountability must go hand-in-hand with training and support for employees and supervisors. We have created a Manager Support Unit in the Bureau of Global Talent Management to help supervisors succeed, especially those managing people

for the first time. Courses such as Fundamentals of Supervision and EEO/Diversity Awareness for Managers, all now available in distance learning formats, also help managers learn and practice some of the competencies necessary to lead skillfully and effectively.

Consistent with the Foreign Service Act of 1980, the Department works to ensure adequate representation of women and members of historically underrepresented groups on Foreign Service Selection Boards. We've incorporated diversity and inclusion into our Civil and Foreign Service performance evaluation processes.

The Department is also increasing its support to the growing number of D&I councils at the bureau and post-level, to give employees a vehicle to regularly discuss issues surrounding diversity and inclusion with bureau and post leadership. As of July 2020, 31 bureaus and 41 posts have established D&I Councils. Our bureau's D&I unit helps to connect these councils, promote collaboration, and facilitate sharing best practices.

My message to Chiefs of Mission, supervisors, and HR professionals is that they—and we as leaders—have a special responsibility to properly address misconduct before it rises to the level of unlawful discrimination. This is a whole-

of-Department responsibility. Each of us plays a critical role in creating a workplace where all employees can realize their full potential.

Tools, training, and support are fundamental for fostering an inclusive workplace culture. But the Department has a legal and moral responsibility to take action when misconduct does arise. I will let Director Smith speak to the mechanisms that the Office of Civil Rights offers employees to report harassment, outside of the EEO process. We take such complaints and allegations with the utmost seriousness. Individuals who engage in sexual or discriminatory harassment may be removed from consideration for senior-level positions or supervisory duties, and may face disciplinary action, up to and including separation when warranted.

Mr. Chairman, I am very grateful for Congress—and, in particular, this Committee’s--longstanding, steadfast support for strengthening diversity and inclusion at the Department. Ultimately, this is about better representing and better serving the American people. Our most successful efforts have been partnerships. And so today I would like to ask to work with you to explore ways to expand paid internships at the Department. Addressing economic need through paid internships is essential to enabling highly qualified students from across the nation, including economically disadvantaged students, to participate in Department opportunities and broaden the circle of inclusion for underrepresented groups. Many students

simply cannot afford to forego a paid position for our unpaid summer internship in one of the most expensive metropolitan areas in the United States. Paid internship opportunities would make a world of difference, and we look forward to working with you to make this a reality.

Fulfilling Our Promise

Mr. Chairman, when I welcome new employees to the Department, I often ask who among them is from my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. In the course of my remarks, I share with them that I first entered the Department as an Eligible Family Member—my husband was a Foreign Service Officer and my first job was as a Community Liaison Office (CLO) Coordinator at post. It's my way of showing that there's no one path to service and that the Department wants and needs Americans of all backgrounds and from every part of the country if we are to effectively advance our nation's security, prosperity, and values through diplomacy.

Like you, our American personnel swear an oath to protect and defend the Constitution, often at great sacrifice to themselves and their families. When I administer the oath of office, I'm inspired by my colleagues' desire to ensure that our institution lives up to our nation's highest ideals—and I am committed to

working with them *and with you* to embody our nation's promise of a "more perfect union."

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to answering your questions.