

Testimony of Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
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Thank you very much Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and other Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on the diverse challenges facing the Central African region. I am honored to testify today with Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region of Africa Tom Perriello.

The Department and the Bureau of African Affairs in particular greatly appreciate the bipartisan support we continue to receive for our work, our embassies, and our people who spend every day striving to promote U.S. national security, foreign policy, and economic interests on the African continent.

It has been over three years since the U.S. Government began implementing the President's four-pillar strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa. In the Central African region, particularly in the countries of Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo, our efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, spur economic growth, advance peace and security, and promote opportunity and development have seen some success and have been met with some setbacks. The progress made in the region is fragile and is at great risk; in fact, this is the region that I am the most concerned about, as it is out of step with the progression of the rest of the continent. President Obama's July speech to the African Union in Addis Ababa, in which he addressed the critical issue of democratic transition -- including term limits, respect for constitutions, and the

peaceful transfer of leadership -- resonated resoundingly across the region. The core principles the President elaborated are the cornerstone of our engagement with leaders who, like President Obama, are facing an end to their time in office according to their own constitutions.

Beginning this past spring and summer and continuing over the next two years, each of the countries in this region has faced or will face the opportunity to realize a true democratic transfer of power. Yet in each of these situations, that agreed-upon process is in doubt. The leaders of these nations have been making fateful decisions whether or not to abide by their previous commitments, respect the rule of law, and responsibly build a foundation of peaceful, elected, democratic leadership and stewardship. And while the challenges facing these countries in this regard are similar, each country's unique history and current socioeconomic reality lend themselves to different approaches for achieving the desired outcome.

Burundi

President Pierre Nkurunziza's ultimate decision to stand for a third presidential term in Burundi was preceded by months of increasingly harsh repression, intimidation, and violence towards legitimate political opposition, independent media, and anyone within his own party who dissented against this plan. Nkurunziza's pursuit of a third term caused the current volatile crisis. This move was a clear violation of the terms of the Arusha Agreement that led to the end of the Burundian Civil War and became the foundation for governance, peace and security. The elections, held in late July, were widely viewed as not fair, not free, and not transparent. The ruling party's youth wing—the *Imbonerakure*—has been armed and has used extreme violence with impunity. We have also been concerned that the government has taken no action to hold accountable members of

the Burundian police and internal intelligence services, who have been credibly alleged to have committed egregious human rights abuses. There are reports of widespread, systematic corruption in government finances to serve the interests of the ruling party and individuals within it. Prevailing circumstances have forced over 200,000 Burundians to flee into neighboring countries since April. Many of those attempting to flee have reported violent confrontations by party militias and police while en route.

The United States continues to urge all Burundian stakeholders to undertake a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue as the best route to finding consensus on a peaceful path forward that preserves the Arusha Agreement, restores stability, and prevents mass atrocities. We support the African Union's strong October 17 statement, calling for EAC mediation efforts and reiterating the immediate need for a genuine and inclusive dialogue. We have consistently condemned violent acts from any quarter – including the attempt to unlawfully seize power in May, and the brutal suppression of protests by security services – and we will continue to do so. Since the beginning of 2014 the Secretary, previous Special Envoy Feingold, Ambassador Power, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Assistant Secretary Malinowski, and I have met with President Nkurunziza at different times to emphasize the importance of respecting the principles of the Arusha Agreement, and emphasizing the connection between good governance and the gains in stability Burundi had made since 2005. We continue to engage all Burundian stakeholders and regional leaders in support of the East African Community's efforts to mediate the crisis with the full inclusion of both the governing party and peaceful representatives of the broad Burundian political opposition and even broader civil society.

Though we do not provide direct budget assistance to the Government of Burundi, we do undertake activities that protect vulnerable populations, for example: by supporting critical health services and mitigating conflict. Our assistance promotes reconciliation and dialogue among youth. We also provide aid that reduces malnutrition among children and improves maternal healthcare.

Ongoing programs managed by the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations engage at-risk youth in conflict prevention and mediation training, facilitate community-level efforts to deescalate violence, and support inclusive political dialogue efforts. In FY 2015, the U.S. government also provided roughly \$34 million in assistance for HIV/AIDS and malaria prevention and treatment, as well as maternal and child healthcare services. We have suspended assistance to Burundi's police forces given their violent suppression of demonstrations and disturbing allegations of their involvement in extrajudicial killings and torture, and we have significantly curtailed assistance to the military, continuing only some aspects of assistance to units currently conducting regional peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the Central African Republic as part of our support for those multilateral missions.

Nkurunziza's grip on power has come at a steep price to the citizens of Burundi, but we are committed to supporting the people of Burundi to achieve a just and lasting peace based on democratic principles, and will continue to work with all stakeholders to make that happen.

Republic of Congo

While the Republic of Congo (RoC) is outside of our definition of the Great Lakes region, it impacts upon and is affected by similar situations in the region. On October 7, President Denis Sassou N'Guesso called for a popular referendum

on October 25 to vote on a proposed new constitution that would overcome existing age and immutable term limits, and would allow him to run again for up to three more terms of five years each. This decision is deeply troubling, especially as the proposed new constitution was developed behind closed doors, with little to no input from the broader body politic or civil society. Congolese citizens will have had less than two weeks to review the document and no opportunity for comment other than to cast an up or down vote. The vote is scheduled to occur prior to the implementation of agreed-upon improvements to electoral governance that would build confidence and improve the credibility of results at the polls. This has created a volatile situation where even a small spark could cause the situation to spiral beyond the government's control with tragic results, and we have already seen violence erupting there this week.

The RoC has made progress in recent years, developing the country's infrastructure, and increasing security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea and on the neighboring Central African Republic. However, transitioning to democracy and a free market economy remains a challenge. The ruling party firmly controls all mechanisms of government; human rights abuses persist; the judiciary is weak; unemployment is at 40 percent; the economy is overly reliant on falling oil revenues; government finances are not entirely transparent; and the challenging business climate inhibits both domestic entrepreneurship and foreign investment. Congolese citizens recognize that their standard of living has not significantly improved despite the considerable rebuilding of physical infrastructure since the 1997-2003 civil war and the substantial government oil revenues that nominally make the RoC a lower middle-income country.

While we do not provide direct budget support to its government, the United States and the RoC have enjoyed increasingly close relations over the last ten

years, cooperating on issues ranging from peacekeeper training to environmentalism and health awareness to a school feeding program, among others. We continue to fund health and education programs, while recognizing that our bilateral relationship with RoC will depend in part on the outcome of the upcoming electoral season.

The current situation in Brazzaville is tense, and our Ambassador there, Stephanie Sullivan, is working tirelessly to help stem violence. She meets frequently with Congolese government and opposition figures to advocate for freedom of peaceful expression and assembly and urge restraint, while simultaneously reiterating our position against constitutional change that allows term-limited incumbents to remain in power. Ambassador Sullivan also consults with her counterparts from other like-minded diplomatic missions and international and non-governmental organizations and figures in Brazzaville to bring the parties together.

We will continue both in public and in private to articulate our position on term limits and democratic transition with senior government ROC officials. The State Department will also continue to emphasize to Congolese government officials that regular, peaceful, democratic leadership transitions provide a dynamic and healthy mechanism for citizens to hold political leaders accountable for their governance and foster long-term stability. No democracy is served when its leaders alter national constitutions for personal or political gain.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

I'll now turn to circumstances across the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Before I get into the electoral and security situations, however, I'd like to take a moment to explain our position on an issue

that has become a significant wedge in our bilateral relations: the continued suspension of exit permits for internationally adopted children. In September 2013, the Congolese government suspended the issuance of exit permits for internationally adopted children after noting an increase in adoption applications from foreigners. The Congolese government cited concerns about possible corruption within its adoption process. As you know, despite the exit permit ban, DRC courts have continued to issue adoption decrees.

Over the past two years, U.S. officials have increasingly engaged with DRC officials at many levels to lift the ban for the hundreds of legally adopted children unable to join their new families. President Obama called President Joseph Kabila to urge him to action. Secretary Kerry has pressed President Kabila to resolve this matter on several occasions. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Michele Bond traveled to the DRC in March and August, and Bureau of African Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary Stuart Symington also engaged government officials there in August. Dr. Jill Biden sent a letter to President Kabila's sister, Jaynet Kabila, in September urging her to consider the humanitarian implications for the children. Our efforts are also being matched with similar high-level engagement by our donor partners whose citizens have adopted children in the DRC. We are grateful that many of you in Congress have made this issue a continuing priority.

Nevertheless, the DRC government has failed to resolve this issue despite many repeated promises over the past 24 plus months to do so. As a result, approximately 400 children legally adopted by U.S. citizens—along with an additional 700 adopted by families from other countries—wait to be united with their loving families. We have also learned that several legally adopted children have died in the DRC while waiting to be united with their adoptive families.

The Department believes the Congolese government should be reminded repeatedly of the importance of immediately releasing all 1,100 children with finalized adoptions. During the United Nations General Assembly meetings last month in New York, Special Envoy Perriello and I once again raised the plight of these children with DRC Foreign Minister Tshibanda and the Congolese delegation. Tshibanda and other Congolese officials, including the new DRC Ambassador to the United States, promised a resolution “soon.” I want to assure you—Members of Congress and your constituents who anxiously wait to bring their children home—this issue remains a priority for the Department. And we will not relent in our efforts until all of these cases are resolved.

The White House’s announcement yesterday of the continuation of the declaration of a national emergency with respect to the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrates that on the political front we remain deeply concerned by the situation there. The DRC has slowly emerged from the 1996-2003 era of what many have called Africa’s World War, which saw over 5.8 million civilians killed by war and related disease. In 2006 and 2011, Congolese citizens voted in the first democratic elections the country had seen since its independence in 1960. The 2006 elections, while generally lauded as a success, were heavily supported by the international community with funding and logistical support. While they happened on time, the subsequent 2011 elections were criticized as seriously flawed and lacking in transparency. These two electoral cycles ushered in significant political, economic, and social progress including the flourishing of a vibrant civil society, the construction of urban infrastructure, and GDP growth rates upwards of nine percent per year.

The DRC’s 2006 constitution, which represents to many Congolese the completion of a process that brought much-needed peace, provides for the

President to serve two consecutive five-year terms. President Kabila's final term is due to end in December 2016. Efforts by the president's parliamentary alliance thus far to amend the constitution or guarantee electoral delay have been vigorously resisted by the opposition, including some in the presidential majority alliance, and the citizenry.

Tom has just concluded a visit there and will go into more detail on our analysis and approach to the situation, but I must note that, at this time, the DRC is not yet at the precipice. There is still time to give priority to holding national elections by the end of 2016. President Kabila faces a choice to solidify his legacy as the first democratically elected President in the DRC's history to establish a tradition of peaceful transition of power; or, he can choose to stay in office, undermining his legacy and ushering an era of instability that will significantly set back the significant progress that has been made during his tenure. It is our hope that he chooses wisely.

The United States has and continues to use the four-pillar approach towards the DRC. In the programs we fund, the policies we support, and the messages we deliver to all actors in the DRC, including President Kabila, we promote accountable, transparent, responsive governance that supports justice and respect for human rights. We seek to strengthen political parties, build rule of law, demand justice and accountability for human rights violations and mass atrocities, promote voter and civic education, provide technical electoral assistance, and build knowledge about the U.S.-DRC relationship through public diplomacy programs. We have tied the DRC's eligibility for renewed benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to the holding of free, fair, and on-time national elections to promote an enabling environment for trade and investment. We continue to engage with the government, UN agencies, and civil society to ensure

civilian protection in the likely event of instability and to bring to justice those who direct and perpetrate violence against civilians. It is our grim assessment that the risk of mass atrocities in the DRC will sharply increase if national elections do not take place on time or if President Kabila extends his mandate. We urge and support the resumption of cooperation between the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the DRC government. Such cooperation would be aimed at protecting civilians and, as promised since this time last year, taking on and eliminating the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and other illegal armed groups that continue to operate and wreak havoc across the east of the country, and which might take advantage of any potential political crisis to expand their power through murder, rape, and pillage. Only with the establishment of sustainable peace and stability will we be able to realize the full benefits of our substantial support to Congolese Government efforts in promoting the welfare of Congolese citizens, especially in the areas of health and education.

Rwanda

The United States has been a strong partner with Rwanda as it continues rebuilding its political, economic, and social structures following the devastating 1994 genocide. While Rwanda has made significant and commendable strides in spurring economic growth and promoting development, we continue to encourage the government to play a constructive role in the region and demonstrate significantly greater respect for human rights and democratic principles.

Rwanda has become a model of inclusive economic growth and a world leader in leveraging development assistance into socioeconomic gains for the vast majority of its people. The United States and Rwanda share the belief that trade, investment, technological development, and market forces are keys to Rwanda's

long-term economic development. We have been proud to partner with Rwanda over the past decade as its economy has grown at an average of over seven per cent per year, as its infant and child mortality rates have been halved, and as HIV and malaria rates have been reduced dramatically with help from the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), respectively. We have recognized Rwanda's leading role in peacekeeping—it is the fifth largest contributor of troops in the world despite its small size and population—by designating it as a priority partner in President Obama's Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership. At the same time, we continue to encourage Rwanda to play a constructive role in the Great Lakes region, and were pleased when Rwanda ended its support to the M23 rebellion in eastern DRC and supported the Nairobi declarations that ended that conflict. We urge Rwanda to continue to follow a policy of constructive diplomatic engagement, rather than sponsoring armed groups, during a period where some of its neighbors face instability and violence, as in Burundi.

The 2017 presidential election is a tremendous opportunity for President Kagame to cement his legacy as a leader who put in place the institutions and systems to sustain his country's development and security well into the future, and who executed an historic peaceful transition of power in accordance with his country's constitution. Thus, we were disappointed when the Rwandan government established a Constitutional Reform Commission that has recommended removing executive term limits, thereby permitting President Paul Kagame to seek a third term in 2017, if he so chooses. We have conveyed to the Rwandan government, both in public and private, that while we respect the ability of any parliament to pass legislation that reflects the will of the people, we continue to firmly support the principle of democratic transitions of power in all

countries through free, fair, and credible elections, held in accordance with existing constitutional provisions on term limits and to encourage President Kagame not to seek a third term. President Kagame has repeatedly stated his commitment to respecting constitutional term limits and to mentoring a generation of leaders able to sustain Rwanda's growth and security, which we would welcome and support.

Uganda

Uganda will also be among the many African countries holding elections next year. As the campaign season begins in November, the United States will continue to encourage a free, fair, and transparent process. Uganda's leaders, security forces, political candidates, and media all have a responsibility to foster an environment in which all Ugandans can express their diverse views in peace, free of violence and intimidation.

Countering the Lord's Resistance Army

With regard to the ongoing efforts to help end the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), I am pleased to report there has been great success through our regional partners, Uganda, Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Sudan. However, since its leader, Joseph Kony, remains at large, the LRA will continue to pose a threat to the stability of the region until Kony is brought to justice and the LRA is diminished to the point it is unable to be reconstituted.

With U.S. support, the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) has significantly degraded the LRA's capacity to launch attacks on civilians and we have witnessed a sharp increase in LRA member defections and captive releases. Over 270 people have either defected, escaped, or been released since 2012. The

number of people killed by the LRA has dropped by 90 percent since 2010 (365 in 2010, 36 in 2014, and 19 through June 30, 2015). During this time, AU-led forces have removed four of the LRA's top five commanders from the battlefield, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictee Dominic Ongwen who defected in January 2015. In June 2015, seven members of Kony's personal security detail also defected. We estimate the LRA now has less than 150 fighters (plus another 150-200 women and children captives), compared to perhaps as many as 1,000 fighters in 2009. As of June 30, 2015, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimated that about 199,000 people were displaced or living as refugees across CAR, DRC, and South Sudan as a result of the LRA threat, a significant decrease from the approximately 326,000 displaced people reported at year-end 2013. These statistics make it clear that our approach is working, but Joseph Kony is still commanding the LRA and until he is brought to justice we remain committed to finishing the work we started.

Our many successes have changed the nature of the LRA threat to the region. Joseph Kony has broken the command structure into several small groups, spread across eastern CAR, DRC, and the disputed area of Kafia Kingi between Sudan and South Sudan. While these groups are still a threat to small communities, their attacks tend to focus more on supporting their own survival, rather than on spreading terror or attempting to grow back into the force they once were. These small groups are pressured by AU-RTF forces to keep on the move and have less and less contact with each other. While this hinders their ability to coordinate attacks, it also makes them more difficult to track and target, especially considering the size and inaccessibility of the LRA-affected region (approximately the size of California over extremely difficult terrain to transverse).

In a May 2015 UN Report, the Secretary-General, while emphasizing the successes of the counter-LRA effort, noted that the LRA continues to pose a regional security threat, particularly in CAR and DRC, by exploiting the lack of state authority and security gaps in remote parts of Central Africa, pursuing opportunistic alliances with other armed groups, and engaging in illicit trade. The LRA's presence in CAR ensured links with other LRA elements in DRC and facilitated trafficking of ivory, gold, and diamonds, including via the disputed Kafia Kingi territory between southern Darfur in Sudan and Western Bahr-al-Ghazal in South Sudan where the presence of senior LRA leaders continues to be reported.

The Department of State and USAID are supporting programs to promote the protection of civilians, along with the rehabilitation and reintegration needs of vulnerable communities in CAR, DRC, and Uganda. State and USAID are funding communication networks, including high-frequency radios, to enhance community-based protection in CAR and DRC. USAID is funding activities through the Secure, Empowered, Connected Communities Programs (SECC) in CAR and DRC and through the Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Equity and Peace (SAFE) program in northern Uganda. The programs are moving ahead with community-based protection, reintegration, and social cohesion activities. USAID and State also continue to provide humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, host community members, and other populations affected by the LRA.

The United States can and will continue to provide critical capabilities and support to help them succeed in their efforts. Although we've witnessed many successes, we must not let up pressure and we must stay the course by getting Kony and helping to provide stability to the region in a post-Kony environment. This is the right thing to do.

Representative Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you again for holding this hearing and giving us the opportunity to discuss our extensive engagement in the region. I hope this information is helpful to the subcommittee. I am glad to answer any questions you might have.