

**Testimony of SBO Barks-Ruggles to the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
International Development, International Organizations,
and Global Corporate Social Impact**

**Hearing Subject: Personnel is Policy: UN Elections and U.S. Leadership in International
Organizations**

Good morning, Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Malliotakis, and Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to today's hearing to discuss what the State Department's International Organization Affairs Bureau is doing to restore and advance U.S. leadership in the UN system.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, the United States has already re-engaged vigorously on the multilateral stage to support key U.S. priorities. We have rejoined the Paris Agreement, recommitted to the World Health Organization, and been reelected to the Human Rights Council. But U.S. leadership in the UN system involves more than simply signing on to existing instruments and reengaging with UN bodies.

We are by far the largest single country contributor to COVAX, the best vehicle for the equitable distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, and we're making hundreds of millions of doses available to others without political strings attached. At the UN Climate Change Conference, or COP 26, in Glasgow, the United States showed up with a whole-of-government response to the climate crisis, and we are rallying the private sector to mobilize the investment and technologies needed to promote a prosperous net-zero U.S. and global economy.

One of our top priorities is to ensure that the UN system, as a key global platform in all these efforts, is strong and resilient in upholding its fundamental values of democracy, justice, transparency, and respect for individual human rights. As we all know, that requires persistence, skill, leadership, and hard work. We are committed to ensuring the UN has the skilled, well-qualified, and capable leadership and personnel it needs to be able to respond to global challenges and find solutions to these difficult issues while ensuring the integrity of the global multilateral architecture.

One of the IO bureau's core responsibilities is to lead State Department efforts to ensure the appointment and elections of qualified, independent U.S. and like-minded candidates to leadership positions in the UN system, including specialized agencies. Having strong candidates for these positions is critical to ensuring the UN operates effectively and in line with its foundational principles and values, as they bring technical and policy skills that enhance the performance and outcomes within the UN system. Having qualified Americans in leadership positions in the UN system bolsters our efforts on UN reform and good governance.

Thanks to the funding that Congress provided earlier this year, IO was able to stand up a new office called the Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel, or IO/MSP, to strengthen and reinforce the United States' leadership and priorities within the UN system. With the establishment of IO/MSP, the bureau is strengthening its coordination and focus on priority elections and appointments. In coordination with the rest of the State Department, this new office is charged with ensuring that the Administration advances a positive, affirmative agenda and vision of U.S. leadership in international organizations that revitalizes and expands partnerships in

support of the rules-based international order. It takes a strategic approach to address the competition we face in achieving our objectives, which include countering the efforts of some countries, such as the People's Republic of China and Russia, to reshape and undermine international law, institutions, principles, and standards.

Since April 2021, the United States has won six consecutive UN elections, including a seat on the UN Human Rights Council and electing independent experts to the International Law Commission, the Commission to Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee Against Torture, the International Narcotics Control Board, and the International Civil Service Commission.

Looking ahead, we are supporting the candidacy of Doreen Bogdan-Martin to head the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), who is running against a Russian candidate. Her election is a top USG priority. Ms. Bogdan-Martin has three decades of experience in the telecom sector and, if elected, would be the first woman to head the ITU in its 156-year history and the first leader from the Americas in 30 years. Her election would help expand universal connectivity that is so critical to development for many countries and uphold an open and multi-stakeholder approach to Internet governance, against state-led models urged by some authoritarian nations.

Beyond election and appointment of U.S. citizens and like-minded candidates to leadership positions, the IO bureau promotes U.S. citizen employment in the UN system at all levels. One of our strategic priorities is expanding the opportunities available to Americans through the UN's

Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Program, as well as broadening our outreach to all U.S. citizens who are interested in a career at the UN. We appreciate the bipartisan support for these efforts to date and look forward to continuing that partnership. While current JPO funding provided by Congress to IO through the IO&P account is restricted to positions within the UN Secretariat, we look forward to working with Congress to expand our JPO efforts throughout the UN System including in rules and standards setting organizations.

In support of our multi-lateral engagement, IO has also funded technology-based solutions to ensure we are working with the best and most current data possible. This includes nascent efforts to construct customized databases and analytical tools to support negotiations, multilateral elections, and American citizen engagement and employment. With the support of Congress, we are looking to build an analytic tool that will allow us to also track UN and other international organizations' resolution language and Member State voting histories to identify trends and coincidences across agencies and over time to allow us to track and plan for multilateral elections, improve U.S. negotiation expertise, and inform policy making. IO is also improving its data capture and analysis to better coordinate multilateral U.S. citizen employment efforts to organize our outreach, advocacy, and engagement with candidates.

These efforts will take time to bear fruit, but the support we have received to date from Congress, the Administration, and partners and allies has been instrumental to laying a strong foundation for success in making sure America's voice is heard throughout the UN system.

While personnel is paramount to ensure strong stewardship and accountability in UN organizations, the Department is also dedicated to supporting our multilateral goals by keeping a close eye on the language of draft resolutions and other documents in the UN to ensure they reflect international values and principles – not the domestic ideology or signature foreign policy initiative of individual Member States. Where these documents put forward ideology or non-consensus language that runs counter to U.S. interests or undermine UN values or international law, IO plays a leading role in coordinating our engagement with other countries to contest problematic texts.

IO works closely with the Department's regional bureaus to integrate multilateral discussions into our regular bilateral engagements in capitals around the world. This includes targeted outreach to developing countries to partner on shared strategic objectives, such as combatting the climate crisis or ending the COVID-19 pandemic, and to showcase the United States' affirmative leadership in the UN system.

The United States also supports Taiwan's access to UN facilities and its meaningful participation in the UN system and participates actively in the semiannual meetings of the U.S.-Taiwan Working Group on International Organizations. The Secretary issued a statement just a few weeks ago calling on Member States to support Taiwan's return to meaningful participation within the UN in ways that are consistent with our One China policy and the Taiwan Relations Act.

To sum up – the United States is back in global leadership. We're back in our alliances, we're back in multilateral fora, and thanks in large part to your support and the hard work of our teams around the world, we're back in the United Nations. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.