

Senate Confirmation Hearing Opening Statement
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield
January 27, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished members of this committee. I'd like to offer special gratitude to Senator Cassidy, from my home state of Louisiana, and Senator Coons, a long-time friend, for their generous introductions.

I am deeply honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and grateful to the President for placing his trust in me.

My husband, Lafayette Greenfield, is here with me today, along with our son Lafayette, whom we all call Deuce. Our daughter, Lindsay, is currently serving in La Paz, Bolivia. I am so proud of them all, and so grateful for their love, support, and sacrifice as I

take on this important position. I would also like to thank my extended family. That includes my relatives in Louisiana and all of the members of the foreign service, who have been sending me so many kind messages of support.

When I joined the Foreign Service in 1982, I was not the norm. My colleagues had gone to Ivy League schools—I had gone to a segregated high school, and LSU as a consequence of a lawsuit. Not to mention, I was joining an organization facing two class action lawsuits that applied to me: one led by Black people in the foreign service, the other by women.

And yet, I had an extraordinary 35-year career, that culminated as the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. To me, that represents the progress, and promise, of America.

Still, I never expected I would have the chance to step into the shoes of so many great luminaries:

Leaders like Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was the Permanent Representative when I first joined the service...

...or my own mentor, Ambassador Ed Perkins, the first African American Ambassador to South Africa, a UN Ambassador, and a giant among diplomats...

...or the iconic Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, followed most recently by four other women: Ambassadors Susan Rice, Samantha Power, Nikki Haley, and Kelly Craft, my most recent predecessor.

Like my mentors, role models, and predecessors, I strongly believe diplomacy is an irreplaceable tool in the work of advancing American interests and building a better world.

Throughout my career, from Jamaica to Nigeria, Pakistan to Switzerland, I've learned that effective diplomacy means more than shaking hands and staging photo ops.

It means developing real, robust relationships. It means finding common ground and managing points of differentiation. It means doing genuine, old-fashioned, people-to-people diplomacy.

President Biden epitomizes that approach. He believes in considering every diplomatic tool in the toolkit—including bringing stronger language and tougher tactics to the table when needed. You can be assured that will be my approach too, if I am so fortunate enough to be confirmed.

Of all our diplomatic tools, perhaps our most powerful instrument is the United Nations itself.

The U.N. is uniquely poised to take on our shared global challenges, from countering terrorism to promoting the rights of women and girls to feeding tens of millions living on the brink of famine.

As Ralph Bunche put it in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, the United Nations is “the greatest peace organization ever dedicated to the salvation of mankind’s future on earth.”

But that’s only true if America is leading the way.

When America shows up—when we are consistent and persistent—when we exert our influence in accordance with our

values—the United Nations can be an indispensable institution for advancing peace, security, and our collective well-being.

If instead we walk away from the table, and allow others to fill the void, the global community suffers—and so do American interests.

In particular: We know China is working across the U.N. system to drive an authoritarian agenda that stands in opposition to the founding values of the institution—American values. Their success depends on our continued withdrawal. That will not happen on my watch.

From climate change to COVID-19, non-proliferation to mass migration, technological disruption to human rights violations, today's problems are urgent, complex, and global. Meeting these

challenges means meeting with our fellow nations, especially in the world's most important diplomatic forum.

To that end, before I answer your questions, let me outline three key priorities that will guide my work as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations if confirmed.

First: Our leadership must be rooted in our core values: support for democracy, respect for universal human rights, and the promotion of peace and security.

Second: We must have the courage to insist on reforms that make the U.N. efficient and effective, and the persistence to see reforms through.

And third: As U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, I would seek to develop a strong partnership with this committee, which I

have had the great pleasure of working with often throughout my career in the Foreign Service.

I want the conversation and collaboration we begin today to continue throughout my service as Ambassador.

Thank you—I look forward to your questions.

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