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Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Stakeout, June 25, 2013

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U.S. Mission to the United Nations

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AS DELIVERED

Ambassador Rice: Good afternoon, everyone. Some of you have already heard me reflect on my four and a half years here at the UN as the best job I have ever had—fun, sometimes frustrating, but always rewarding. And it's been rewarding for two reasons.

First, the people. I'll greatly miss working with such a committed and talented group of individuals: my fellow Ambassadors, our amazing team at the U.S. Mission, the Secretary-General and his dedicated staff at the UN, the NGO community, and, of course, you guys, who work day in and day out to tell the people of the world what's happening at the United Nations.

The second reason, however, is because of the vital work of the United Nations that I have been so privileged to be part of since January 2009. It's been a remarkable period for the United States, for the United Nation, and the world as we have carried out President Obama's pledge to bring a new era of engagement to the United Nations. We've improved relations with allies, built and strengthened new partnerships, and exerted effective American leadership on issues that matter most to the United States. We've repaid past arrears and met our financial commitments. We joined the Human Rights Council believing that American engagement would improve its performance, and it has. We have worked constructively with a range of partners on a wide variety of important issues in the General Assembly.

This approach, taken as a whole, has enabled key accomplishments of the last several years. The Security Council has levied the stiffest sanctions ever against Iran and North Korea, imposing real costs for nuclear proliferation and the violation of their international obligations. We adopted a mandate that saved countless lives in Libya. We acted to rectify a stolen election in Cote d'Ivoire; supported the birth of a new nation in South Sudan; and worked tirelessly to prevent renewed conflict between North and South.

This Council has also supported political transformations in Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. We've taken action to pursue President Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons, including the first comprehensive Security Council resolution on nuclear issues in a decade—Resolution 1887. In addition, the U.S. has strengthened and reformed the nature and implementation of UN sanctions to make them tougher, more innovative, and more targeted.

Just as important, we've together championed human rights and universal values, leading efforts to call to account the world's worst abusers. We've joined with colleagues to advance women's equality, protection, and empowerment around the world, to integrate more fully women's issues into the work of the United Nations, including through the establishment of UN Women. Together with our partners, we've helped lead a remarkable shift on LGBT issues at the United Nations by winning accreditation for LGBT NGOs, opposing discrimination and violence against LGBT persons, and working to make clear to all that LGBT rights are human rights.

We've forcefully opposed unbalanced and biased actions against Israel across the UN system, standing shoulder to shoulder with Israel on principle—regardless of whether such actions were popular in these halls.

We've pushed for significant progress towards a more efficient and fiscally responsible UN—saving hundreds of millions of tax payer dollars for Americans and people around the world. We supported the OIOS to be a strong and independent watchdog of the United Nations and set a new standard for transparency in the UN system by securing agreement to make its internal audit reports—as well as those of the New York funds and programs—publicly available. We've advocated successfully for reforms to modernize how the United Nations delivers services to the field and pressed the UN to improve its personnel management policies.

And yet, I remain acutely aware that the work and responsibility of the United Nations is never finished. Conflict, abuse, atrocities, poverty, and suffering persist in too many places. I particularly regret that the Security Council has failed to act decisively while more than 90,000 Syrians have been killed and millions more displaced. The Council's inaction on Syria is a moral and strategic disgrace that history will judge harshly.

We have also not achieved desperately needed humanitarian access by the government of Sudan to the Two Areas, where millions are suffering. In Darfur, tragically, conflict and killing persist.

There remain big questions about the future of development—including how to forge a post-2015 development agenda that continues to eradicate poverty and foster economic growth in a sustainable way. And as President Obama discussed today, we have significant work ahead to prepare for and mitigate the grave consequences of climate change.

In short, much remains to be done to modernize the United Nations to enable it to meet the challenges of the 21st century and realize the aspirations of its founders. This includes necessary follow through on important reforms related to peacekeeping, whistleblower protections, and financial and accounting practices.

But I'm very proud of what we've accomplished together here. I'm also excited about the work that lies ahead, which will require even stronger international partnership. Without question, the United States will be ably and energetically represented by my nominated successor, Samantha Power, who is now before the Senate, knock on wood, for confirmation.

And rest assured that even though you won't be seeing my smiling face every day, I will still be reading your stories, following the United Nations closely from Washington, and looking forward to the next time our paths cross.

And let me just say before I conclude, a special thank you to my tireless, incredibly skilled, and long-suffering press team, especially Erin and Payton and Kurtis, who have served me and the Mission so well.

So with that, I am happy to take a few of your questions.

Reporter: Thank you. Madame Ambassador, I wonder—you're going to start this new job as National Security Advisor at a troubling time for national security, both domestically and internationally. I wonder whether you could speak a little on the challenges that you see ahead in your new job.

Ambassador Rice: Well, Edie, I am very well aware that, like my predecessors, the world is never forgiving and always pitches at us new challenges. I am very excited, however, about the prospect of working very closely with President Obama and the incredibly skilled members of his national security team and his national security cabinet. Together, we will do our utmost to fulfill the President's most solemn obligation to protect the American people and uphold our values and interests. And while I am not prepared to predict that all will go swimmingly in every instance, I will continue, with my colleagues, to do our utmost on behalf of the American people.

Reporter: Thank you Ambassador. Can you comment on the autocratic governments of Ecuador, China, Russia characterizing themselves in the Snowden case as defenders of democracy as against the United States? And what was your highest point and lowest point during your years here?

Ambassador Rice: Well, I think the records of other countries speaks for themselves, and I don't think I need to elaborate on them, particularly now. With respect to high points and low points, I have had many high points. I tried to reflect on a few of them in my opening remarks. I am particularly proud that the Council came together and succeeded in underscoring that those who are the worst proliferators in the world and those who have violated their obligations with respect to their nuclear programs now uniformly feel the pressure and concern and isolation of the international community and what we have accomplished. With respect to that, I think it's having tangible results in terms of progress on policy, so I am grateful that this Council with American leadership and participation has been able to strengthen the pressure on Iran and North Korea.

Obviously, also, having had the extraordinary privilege of visiting Libya myself in November of 2011 and meeting with the citizens of Benghazi, and Tripoli to hear the mothers and the young people express their gratitude to the Security Council for Resolution 1973,

which in their judgment saved countless hundreds of thousands of lives—that obviously too will always be a source of pride and gratitude.

I am gratified that the people of Cote d'Ivoire and South Sudan have at least the prospect of futures that they have chosen freely and democratically. And I could go on, but also I am particularly proud—as I mentioned today, this month is LGBT Pride Month. Tonight, my last official social event will be to host a dinner in the honor of LGBT Pride Month. And what we have done here in the UN on behalf of human rights—the rights of all people regardless of their race, their religion, their sexual orientation, or any other descriptor—is something also that I am very proud of.

Low moments—those too have been a few. But I think, to be very frank as I suggested in my statement, the repeated failure of the Security Council to unify on the crucial issue of Syria, I think, is a stain on this body and something that I will forever regret, even though I don't believe that outcome is a product of the action of the United States or its closest partners.

Reporter: Forgive the bluntness of this question, please. But you spoke of (*inaudible*). Will you do something to reverse this when you are at the NSC?

Ambassador Rice: Well, Raghida, this is not part of my legacy or the U.S. legacy. But the fact is, as you know and your colleagues know as well as anybody else, the Security Council has three times voted, and three times has faced a double veto—not by the United States but by Russia and China—of very mild resolutions aimed at beginning to address the situation in Syria. Those resolutions didn't contain sanctions. They didn't contain the threat of the use of force, much less authorize the use of force. And yet we've been paralyzed. And I don't know how, in any circumstance, one would ascribe that to a failure of U.S. policy or U.S. leadership when the vast majority of the Council was ready and willing to move ahead.

Now I understand nations have their interests, and nations have their perspectives. And in this instance we differ. In many other instances, we have been able to come together and to do the work of the international community, and about that I am proud. And that is the balance of the record. But with respect to Syria, I think the facts speak for themselves. Iran's violation of sanctions and its support for the government in Syria is reprehensible. We have condemned it. We have worked forcefully in the Sanctions Committee to strengthen enforcement and to impose penalties for Iran's violation of the sanctions regime. In this instance and in others—and again there, quite frankly, Raghida—when action has been blocked, it hasn't been blocked by the United States.

Reporter: Picking up on an issue that you were just talking about, and you're going to have to continue to deal with in your new job. Russia has been, on a number of issues, at odds with the United States, not just on Syria. We're seeing with the Snowden case that they simply aren't cooperating with the U.S. Are you concerned as we move further into the 21st century that Russian/U.S. relations and the difficulties in that are going to increasingly put limitations on the U.S. ability to carry out its foreign policy around the world?

Ambassador Rice: Well, obviously, it's a complex and multi-faced relationship that we have, both bilaterally and here, in a multi-lateral forum. But if had to look back on the balance of my experience over the last four and a half years, while there have been important points of diversion—you mentioned Syria—I would add to that on occasion Sudan or Sudan and South Sudan—but the vast majority of the things we've accomplished in the Security Council, by definition, have been accomplished in partnership and with the support of the majority of the Council, including the veto-wielding members and obviously that includes Russia. So, while there are certainly important points of divergence and there will be—and there have been points of friction and there undoubtedly will be in the future, I'm not prepared to predict that that is inevitable and certainly not across the board, where on issues as important as Iran and North Korea and many others, we have been able to find common ground and to effect outcomes that are beneficial.

Reporter: You said on North Korea and Iran that you've seen tangible results on sanctions, but last week, the North Korean ambassador here had very tough words for your policy—for U.S. policy—and Iran (*inaudible*). What's going to happen there? Will the U.S. increase pressure on these two states?

Ambassador Rice: First of all, in the context of the United Nations, we have repeatedly—in the case of North Korea—been able to strengthen and tighten the sanctions regime because the entire international community is of one mind that North Korea cannot and will not be a nuclear state accepted by the international community, that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is an imperative, and we are committed to ensuring that. And on that, we are wholly united.

Similarly, with Resolution 1929, which is the latest in a series and a very powerful resolution that has been accompanied by quite active enforcement in the Sanctions Committee—even though there have been instances of shortcomings and times when we have not gotten all that we have sought—the sanctions regime is stronger than ever. It is clearly a topic of political and economic import in Iran, and the whole world is, again, clear that Iran's violations are unacceptable and come at an increasingly higher cost. And certainly the United

States on a bilateral basis and many other countries on a national basis have continued to ratchet up (*inaudible*) and put pressure on Iran. Now our hope remains that the issue of Iran's nuclear program can be resolved through what we have long called the dual-track policy of pressure and engagement. But the prospects for that rest squarely on the decisions that the Iranian government makes, and we have underscored our readiness to work these issues at the negotiating table if they are serious. But at the same time we have steadily and meaningfully increased the pressure to affect their decision-making.

Reporter: Ambassador, if this has been the best job you've ever had, why leave?

(*laughter*)

Ambassador Rice: Jonathan, I serve at the pleasure of the President.

Question: Madame Ambassador or should I say National Security Advisor, in your new role, Madame Ambassador—taking into consideration the position of the United States that Assad must go, can you contemplate any possibility for a victory for the axis of Syria, Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran over the freedom fighters and the opposition who are trying to have a democratic and free Syria?

Ambassador Rice: Well, look, I think we've seen in this region of the world and many other parts of the world that these struggles can be long and costly, but rarely can I think of an instance in recent history where, at the end of the day, the aspirations—the unified aspirations—of the people for freedom and to chart their own future are ultimately suppressed. And I think—I'm hopeful that the Syrian people will have the opportunity to chart their own future, to do so in a fashion consistent with universal values and principles. And certainly the United States is committed to supporting them in those efforts, and we will remain so.

Reporter: But there are many who are saying that the Syrian government now and their allies are gaining the upper hand while the Europeans are still dilly-dallying with supporting them. I mean, the United States has declared its position now in arming the moderates within the opposition. What are your thoughts, you know, concerning the reluctance of many countries who are calling for arming—like Britain and France, are hesitant now?

Ambassador Rice: Talal, I wouldn't share your characterization. I would refer you to the meeting that happened last week in Doha where the core group of the Friends of Syria issued a very strong and unified declaration—a shared agreement that we were all, in our own ways, going to meaningfully increase our support to the moderate and legitimate forces within the Syrian opposition. So, I think that was an important step forward. It was another point of unity among countries of the region and beyond who share the objectives that I just outlined.

Reporter: You mentioned Darfur and the Two Areas, and I wanted to know—since you've been here, in terms of Sudan as a whole, where is it going? There was—Nafie Ali Nafie was supposed to visit the US. It's been put off. Do you think you will continue to work on this issue in your new role? And what can you say beyond sort of putting out the fires in the three areas that you've mentioned? There seem to be problems throughout the country. What's the U.S. strategy? And what would it take for Sudan to do to have someone like Nafie or someone else actually come to the United States.

Ambassador Rice: Yes, Mathew, I expect to continue to work on this issue along with many others. (*background noise*) Hold on—if I might finish the answer. Yes, indeed, I will continue to work on the issue. The issues of Sudan and South Sudan have from the very beginning of the Administration been high priorities for President Obama and will continue to be.

We have long indicated that our preference is for an improved relationship with Sudan but in the context of Sudan meeting the most fundamental obligations to its own people. And what we have seen tragically in Darfur and more recently in the Two Areas—and now with Sudan's violation of the September 27th Agreement with South Sudan reflected in their decision to suspend oil flows, which are not meant to be suspended under the September 27th Agreement but only for technical reasons, not for political reasons—is discouraging and has certainly shaded our view of the timeliness of such an encounter. We remain in communication with the leadership in Khartoum. We will continue to do so. But there are important steps that the United States feels ought to be taken to protect the people of Sudan, which is the responsibility of the government, and those have always been central to our interest in and ability to make meaningful progress in improving the relationship.

Reporter: (*inaudible*)

Ambassador Rice: Yes, yes. As I came here, and as I leave it, I am very much of the view that the United Nations, despite its many imperfections, remains an indispensable institution. It is the only venue in which all countries in the world come together, and it is the only venue in which the decisions of our legal body, particularly the Security Council, have the weight of international law and the weight of international legitimacy. And its decisions are binding on every country in the world, and that is itself indispensable.

I have found that the United States has been able to advance our interests, defend our values, protect our citizens far better when this institution performs to its capacity. And more often than not, it does. In notable instances, it doesn't. And that is a reminder of what more we all have to do. First and foremost, we, as Member States—that is ultimately where most of the blame lies—and also with respect to the institution itself. I have found the people of the United Nations to be incredibly talented and dedicated international public servants. Once in a while, the inefficiencies, even the instances of corruption are tragic and undermine the legitimacy of this institution. I think the Secretary-General has gone out of his way to enhance efficiencies and achieve economies and to make this place operate in a manner worthy of its founding principles. But it will not be uniform or perfect, and we all have to work—including the good work you all do—to strive to make it better. But I leave here very convinced and confident that if—as some have said, if this place did not exist, we would have to invent it. Thankfully, we did. And now, we just need to make it the best we can.

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