

Ambassador Avant Swearing-In Remarks
September 9, 2009 @ 5:30 PM
Treaty Room, Department of State

Madame Secretary, family, friends, esteemed colleagues and guests,

I am humbled to be standing here before you today and I want to thank everyone for joining me and my family to celebrate this very special occasion.

To Secretary Hillary Clinton, I want to express my sincerest gratitude to you for taking time out of your busy schedule to conduct my swearing-in today. It is truly an honor to have you with us.

I would especially like to thank President Obama for his continued faith and confidence in me.

I would like to extend a special welcome to Ms. Rhoda Jackson, Chargé of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to the United States. I would also like to welcome the former U. S. Ambassadors to The Bahamas who have joined us today.

To the United States Senators, Representatives and agency heads with whom I've already had the privilege of meeting, I have been so impressed by your willingness to share your knowledge and insights and your commitment in service to our country. I look forward to collaborating with all of you.

To the wonderful, knowledgeable and patient professionals at the State Department and United States Embassy in Nassau with whom I have been privileged to work with -- your guidance and assistance has been tireless and been nothing short of phenomenal. I look forward to a continued working relationship with you.

To my family: father Clarence, mother Jacqueline and brother Alex: my profound love and gratitude for your eternal support is beyond measure and far more than words can convey. I love you with all my heart.

To my new family: My husband Teddy and our children Sarah and Tony, I love you all so very much and I look forward to our new life and many amazing adventures together.

From an early age, I have benefited from the wonderful influence of my parents, whose passion for philanthropy, politics and culture left an indelible mark. They instilled in us the importance of using our talents to learn, to mentor, to uplift and to serve--in any way possible. I have strived to follow in their footsteps and eagerly await the opportunity to apply the lessons I've learned; service to ideals and principles; service on behalf of the economically disadvantaged and children in need.

I am honored to have the opportunity to serve in The Bahamas and advance our close and mutually beneficial partnership. Beyond geographic proximity, the United States and The

Bahamas share a commitment to democratic ideals, the rule of law and strategic interests that span issues of regional security, economic and social progress, energy security and stewardship of the environment. This strong relationship has been described by the leaders of both our nations as “excellent.” My mission is to keep it that way.

In the area of regional security, The Bahamas plays a critical role in working together with us to monitor and protect our third border. There is no better example of multi-agency, multi-national cooperation than the success of Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos – OPBAT -- which has for twenty-five years significantly reduced the deadly flow of illegal drugs through The Bahamas and ultimately to our children in the United States.

In terms of economic development and trade, our geographic proximity has been a major factor in facilitating trade opportunities and helping tourism in particular to thrive. Nearly five million American citizens travel to The Bahamas each year, which accounts for nearly 85% of all visitors. We will continue to provide first-rate services to United States citizens in The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands and expand outreach programs aimed at improving emergency planning, especially for hurricanes.

I am also excited about the possibilities to help our Bahamian partners identify and exploit new prospects for economic growth, not only in the tourism area, but in eco-trade, sustainable/green energy and technology.

In the area of social development, we have the wonderful opportunity to promote educational advancement through the Read to Lead program and HIV/AIDS and cancer awareness to improve health-care for women--issues that I have always been passionate about.

In closing, let me say again how humbled and blessed I am to be here and to have been given this incredible opportunity to serve our country. I promise to do my best.