

U.S. Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard Presents Credentials to the Government of Nigeria

Abuja, Nigeria – U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mary Beth Leonard presented her credentials to His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari at a ceremony at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, Nigeria, on December 24, 2019. The U.S. Senate confirmed Ambassador Leonard on August 1, 2019 after she was nominated for the position by U.S. President Donald Trump on June 24, 2019. She was sworn in as the Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria on October 4, 2019 in Washington, D.C.

Ambassador Leonard has said she will leverage U.S. diplomacy, foreign assistance and the private sector to partner with Nigeria to expand economic growth, increase security and counter corruption. “I would look to harness U.S. tools – from existing ones like the African Growth and Opportunity Act and our hard-working Foreign Commercial and Agriculture Service Officers – to newer ones like Prosper Africa and the Development Finance Cooperation’s increased budget for insurance, loans and loan guarantees, and equity investments to promote our mutual prosperity” she stated.

Speaking on Nigerian youth and the potential they hold Ambassador Leonard said “Like Americans, Nigerians are hard-working, inventive, and entrepreneurial. Nigeria’s youth are fueling exceptional endeavors in areas from Information Technology to agriculture, offering the promise of the opportunities the country will need to meet the challenge of its youthful demographics.” She will therefore work to channel America’s dynamism to support Nigeria towards prosperity and security.

Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor. From 2016 to 2019, Ambassador Leonard was the Representative of the United States of America to the African Union, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. She also served as U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). She was previously the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Mali from 2011-2014. Her service in Mali was recognized with the Department’s Diplomacy for Human Rights Award in 2013, an honor that annually recognizes a U.S. Chief of Mission who has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to defending human rights and advancing democratic principles in his or her host country.

She served as the State Department’s Senior Faculty Advisor at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, following a year as the Department’s Diplomat in Residence for New England, based at Tufts University. Ambassador Leonard was the Director for West African Affairs at the U.S. Department of State from 2009-2011, and Deputy Chief of Mission in Bamako, Mali from 2006-2009.

After joining the State Department in 1988, Ambassador Leonard served overseas as an economic and consular officer in Yaoundé, Cameroon; Windhoek, Namibia; and Lomé, Togo. She also worked in the Department’s Operations Center and in its Office of Central African Affairs. She then served as political and economic officer in Cape Town, South Africa and thereafter as Deputy Chief of Mission in Paramaribo, Suriname.

Ambassador Leonard, a native of Massachusetts, graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. from Boston University, with a major in economics and a minor in French. In 1988, she earned a master's degree in international relations, with an emphasis on African studies, from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. In 2004, she received a Master of Security and Strategic studies the U.S. Naval War College, with distinction. She speaks French, Spanish, Afrikaans, and Dutch.

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