**2023 J. Raymond “Jit” Trainor Award Ceremony for Excellence in the Conduct of Diplomacy in honor of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield**

14 March 2023

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Good afternoon, everybody, friends, colleagues, and students.

I'm Barbara Bodine and I am the director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown School of Foreign Service and your co-host today. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2023 J. Raymond "Jit" Trainor Awards Ceremony for Excellence in the Conduct of Diplomacy in honor of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. Today's event is also the inaugural event marking the Institute's 45th anniversary.

I would like to acknowledge Annie Leuker and the entire ISD staff. This was a whole of institute effort along with Marie Harf and her team for their tireless work to make today's arrangements for today's event, a very special shout out to our student volunteers who step forward to assist us today. Before I introduce our guest, esteemed colleague, ISD fellow, and friend Linda Thomas-Greenfield, I'd like to turn the podium over to Joel Hellman, the Dean of the School of Foreign Service.

**Dr. Joel Hellman:** Thank you. Let me start with a warm thank you to Barbara Bodine, Ambassador Barbara Bodine, and her team at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. Every day they bring top-notch practitioners together with our students to teach them the power and the craft of diplomacy, exemplifying really one of the hallmarks of SFS that our students get to learn directly from the people who have actually done the work in the halls of power. So, I want to begin this celebration with what might seem to you like a surprising admission. I miss the days of Donald Trump. Trump's assault on American diplomacy was paradoxically a boom time for SFS. We became America's premiere rest home for beleaguered diplomats around the world, including the likes of Masha Yovanovitch, Stephen Mull, Jeff DeLaurentis, and of course none more prominent than our honoree today, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield. In addition to the achievements that she has made through an incredible career in diplomacy, she taught courses here in diplomatic studies.

She mentored a new generation of aspiring diplomats and was an inspiring presence herself on the Georgetown campus, keeping alive the flame of what is best in American diplomacy. Then President Biden had to go and bring her back into government as he did among our most accomplished diplomats back into the most critical roles. And for a dean, I guess it's some consolation that Georgetown's loss is a gain for America and the world. Today we come together to celebrate the practice of diplomacy at a school that has become synonymous with diplomacy. We are proud to have produced more diplomats than any other school in the nation. We are proud to have more Fulbright awardees than any other school in the nation. We are proud to host more Pickering, Rangel, and Payne fellows than any other school in the nation. And we do all this at a moment in which the art of diplomacy has never been more critical.

With an unprovoked war against the sovereign nation on the European continent, with a looming threat of a new Cold War in the midst of a realignment of great power competition, with the stirring of renewed extremism in the Middle East, and with the rise of truly existential global problems that require unprecedented global cooperation. This generation, your generation must learn the art of diplomacy from our best practitioners, but at the same time, you must reinvigorate diplomacy with new tools and new approaches appropriate to a very different era.

So, it's against this backdrop that we come together to honor the art of diplomacy with the Trainor Award and we could not have a more deserving practitioner in today's honoree. It's our great privilege to recognize Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield for her life of service to this country and is a model of the practice of diplomacy at its very best in postings around the world, at senior levels in Foggy Bottom, and today leading the U.S. Mission in the UN. Let me urge students here to learn from her experience and her wisdom and to be inspired by her example. This country needs a lot more LTGs, and for that reason, it's an honor for us to honor you. Thank you very much.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Thank you very much. Dean Hellman. The Trainor Award is unique for many reasons. It recognizes leaders in diplomacy and statecraft across the U.S. government, not just within the State Department and international diplomats from across the globe. Each honoree worked to shape events and thereby shaped history for the benefit of all. The first Trainor event was held in 1978, coincident with the launch of the Institute, and honored Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, with remarks by one Henry Kissinger. Among its recipients are Ambassador Masha Yovanovitch, who's with us today. Thank you, Masha. The late Madeleine Albright and last year in what just seems like it was really just last month, CIA director Bill Burns. In reviewing the very long list of Trainor recipients over the decades, I was struck by the breadth of background and achievements that we recognized. They included U.S. Secretary of Energy, Ernest Moniz, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, the head of the World Bank and the IMF, and diplomats in policy leaders from 13 countries.

Excellence in diplomacy is blessedly a global phenomena too often in short supply and very rarely heralded. This award is also unique in that it honors a revered university administrator, a living legacy made possible through an endowment created by his former students whose lives he profoundly touched during the decades of his service to the school. I would like to recognize Frank Hogan, the Chair of the Trainor endowment, whose support makes this annual event possible. After 23 years as Chair, this will be Frank's last Trainor event, at least in his official capacity. Joining us today is the new chair, Allison Kropp, who has worked alongside Frank for a number of decades, and we welcome you Allison, and I am very sad to see Frank go.

A proud Marine and an equally proud Hoya, Frank has had his own remarkable career of public service. He attended the School of Foreign Service on the GI Bill and has dedicated his life's work in support of the men and women of the U.S. military and their families, active duty and retired, abroad and at home. A longstanding member of the ISD Board of Advisors. He has been equally engaged in support of those who serve through diplomacy and to the institute's mission to prepare the next generation of global policy leaders. Frank, I would like to thank you for all your public service to so many over the years and for your support for all of us who serve and have served. Mr. Hogan.

**Frank J. Hogan:** Thank you so much Barbara for those overly generous remarks. Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, Dean Hellman, Ambassador Anderson, Ambassador Bodine, excellencies, and I should mention former Trainor recipient Marsha Yovanovitch, Ambassador Yovanovitch. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and warm greetings to all. It is a great pleasure to speak with you today on behalf of the endowment that makes the Trainor Award possible. The Trainor Award and lecture series celebrates excellence in the conduct of diplomacy. It was established by the alumni of the School of Foreign Service as a living memorial to Jay Raymond "Jit" Trainor. The Trainor Trust Board of Advisors could not be more delighted to honor you, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield for your exemplary service to the United States of America, and it is an added special pleasure to welcome you back to Georgetown today. You and your remarkable career encompassing some very challenging assignments, though perhaps you are now engaged in a more visible, more demanding, and more critical assignment, embody what the Trainor Award set out to recognize when it was established some 44 years ago.

Quite deservedly, you joined an impressive list of other Trainor luminaries, all in the pursuit of peace and understanding among nations. We look forward with your remarks today with great anticipation. When Jit Trainor first entered Georgetown as an eager young freshman, he had little inkling that he would be part of this great institution for the next 33 years, let alone leave such an important legacy. Doubtless he did not anticipate either that he would acquire a nickname that would stay with him the rest of his life. From the jitney, an unregulated taxi, the Uber of its day, if you will, he drove while a student to help make ends meet. Jit made his mark at the School of Foreign Service as secretary. In that capacity, he guided it with a steady hand and enjoyed the complete confidence of the school's founder, the renowned father, Edmund A. Walsh.

However, what made Jit so special was his unwavering focus on his students. They were the family he and his wife never had. Though he had opportunities to be dean, Jit declined them for fear that it would interfere with his contact with the students. Ready listener, wise counselor, older friend, surrogate parent, father confessor, as well as born educator, probably all described Jit's interactions with his charges, who included returning veterans from World War I, the cash strapped financially students of the depression years and still later returning veterans from World War II and Korea. Jit was the go-to person when a student needed some extra assistance, some encouragement, confidential advice, perhaps a loan, or even a gentle or not-so-gentle nudge. When Jit retired, a feature article in The Courier, the student magazine of its day perhaps captured him best when it indicated his door was always open.

He was ever approachable and ever-giving of himself. On a personal note, I arrived at Georgetown at the very end of Jit's career but was privileged to get to know him well in his retirement year. I shall be eternally grateful for his invaluable counsel and support during the early stages of my own career, Jit meant so much to an entire generation of students that there was a groundswell among all the alumni to recognize his legacy in a special way upon his death in 1976. What better way indeed to perpetuate his memory than an annual award and lecture series that honors excellence in the conduct of diplomacy. By establishing the Trainor endowment, the trustees and School of Foreign Service alumni, hope that we have contributed to the spirit and traditions that help make up this great university. Thank you.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** It is 1,344.3 miles from Baker Louisiana to New York City. About 20 hours by car via I-81, or 18 days on foot. I couldn’t get a read on how long to cycle that distance, but it is a bit too far for me.

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield’s journey from Baker to New York took a bit longer – about four decades. It was time well spent. A journey of purpose, of service, of impact… a life spent working on intractable global challenges and in many of our most challenging posts, including the most demanding bureaus at State. It was a journey of detours, exploration, and discovery.

The basic outlines of Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield’s career are deceptively simple and straightforward – college, grad school, a string of Foreign Service postings starting with visa officer in Kingston, Nairobi, Nigeria, Pakistan, the UN Mission in Geneva. … and The Gambia early on, as well as tours as senior officer in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, and in the Africa Bureau’s front office. She was ambassador to Liberia as it emerged from the horrors of civil war. As Director General of the Foreign Service, she not only advocated for change but made change happen, dedicated to a service, her service, – foreign and civil – the attracted but also retained and rewarded the best this country has to offer. And, for 4 years, as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs she drew attention to and shaped policies and programs that recognized the continent’s multitudinous countries’ achievements, capacity, and potential – and to the rich resource of a young and striving population, beyond the headlines of despair.

She left the service as part of a concerted effort to “decapitate” (her word, the right word) the senior career levels of the Department. Linda found a temporary home at ISD, and we were delighted to welcome her as our inaugural Distinguished Resident Fellow for African Studies, as a colleague, a friend, a gifted teacher, and an always-available mentor to the many, many students who looked to her wisdom, her honesty, and her grit as they charted their own journeys.

Linda never lost sight of where she started, a path forward not bound by, but firmly grounded by home. And one of “agency” – that we all write our own chapters. The eldest of eight children and raised in an impoverished small rural town in the Jim Crow Deep South, she was the first in her family to graduate high school. A proud Cajun, she attended Louisiana State University where the welcome was not always warm, and the obligation to succeed, not just for herself but for those that followed, was real. She honed her skills confronting bigotry and hatred debating a fellow student - David Duke, a future grand wizard of the KKK – at a Hyde Park-like space. There is little in New York that will impress or intimidate her. Duke later ran for office in Louisiana. He fared about as well with the Louisiana public as he did against Linda. He lost.

An aspiring lawyer, the first of many detours was to a master’s in African studies at University of Wisconsin, and a turn again to the PhD program as an aspiring academic. She was not an aspiring diplomat…not until a research trip to Liberia…a detour that changed her life on many levels – it is where she met her husband - and set her path to today.

President Biden launched his transition in November 2020 with a celebratory announcement of his foreign policy team. With the promise that “America is Back; Diplomacy is Back,” he announced Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield as his choice to be the US representative to the United Nations, with Cabinet rank. Biden’s decision reflected the centrality of multilateralism and global engagement as a core tool of his American diplomacy. It also reflected his respect for and validation of the value of Linda’s voice as a key policy adviser. Her experience at the highest level of our policy decision-making process, and in the most complex multilateral fora and on the existential transnational issues we face, made her an inspired choice. Diplomacy was back; multilateralism was back…and LTG, as she is fondly known, was back. The journey from Baker to New York was complete.

Since that time, the Ambassador has been a clear and consistent advocate for American interests, and America’s values, in a world where those values are under threat every day outside and inside this country. She has carried with her a lesson she learned working with Liberia’s Nobel Prize-winning President, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson - deal forthrightly with hard political issues, tempered by compassion, and always be true to yourself. When she advocates for global engagement on the devastation of famine – she remembers a young refugee girl from Somalia – and I am quoting her now, “I made a call of desperation to the rest of the world…so we don’t ever have to watch a young child die in front of our eyes”. When she confronts a Russian diplomat on his country’s imminent invasion of Ukraine, she speaks with the power and conviction of one who has witnessed the ravages of war on a society and a people.

Genocide, war crimes, and rape are not legal abstractions, but realities she confronted throughout her assignments in Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, and as ambassador to Liberia. She has worked the corridors of power and walked the camps of the powerless. When she talks about the tragedy of refugees, she has been there – too many “theres” – in the camps where people have fled for their lives, and languish in hopes for their future. Through all of this, she remains committed to the future and the possible.

Her own journey to New York has not waivered from the essential value of the person, of an understanding of the impact of policies on people…. compassion, humility, and the courage to confront the tough decisions, the hard solutions, and see the possibility for change. Who better to be recognized today for “excellence in the conduct of diplomacy” than Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, and to share with us her insights on the role of diplomacy and the struggle for human rights.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Good afternoon. Thank you so much, Frank. I want to particularly thank you for your support when I was here on campus, the support of the board; it was really an honor to be part of that. Thank you so much, Barbara, for welcoming this refugee to Georgetown. I used to call the ISD House the “refugee camp,” and I was one of those. Dean Hellman, thank you so much. And to the Trainor Trust, thank you. Thank you for this extraordinary award. And let me thank the entire Georgetown community – friends and colleagues who are here with us today. It is really an honor to receive the “Jit” Trainor Award. His example of service is one we all aspire to.

The last recipient of this award, my friend Ambassador Burns, said it well: this award not only honors me, but also our country’s rich tradition of diplomacy and public service. And in that tradition, I feel the need to take full advantage of this opportunity, and this esteemed assemblage of the foreign policy community, to talk about an issue that has been at the forefront of my mind: the struggle for universal human rights. After all, there is a direct connection between public service and human rights, between personal sacrifice and preserving fundamental freedoms.

75 years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt stood in a room with diplomats from more than 50 other countries. They were preparing to vote on an unprecedented document. A document so sweeping, so powerful, and so dramatic that it would impact every single person on earth. At 3 o’clock in the morning, after two years of intense negotiations, they adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For the first time, world leaders came together and declared for all: human rights are universal. Everyone is entitled to inalienable freedoms and protections.

But Eleanor made the point that it isn’t enough to put our noble ideals on paper. They must actually exist in the world, at the level of the individual person. They must exist, to use her phrase, in the small places close to home. As she said, and I quote, “Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere”. And this is what I mean by the connection between diplomacy and this declaration, between public service and fundamental freedoms. Those of us in public service are the ones who must make rights real. We are the ones who must translate our documents into deeds, our ideals into actualities.

In the lead-up to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, President Roosevelt urged Eleanor to give a speech outlining what this document would mean for the world -- especially because not every country was respecting these rights. She entitled it the “Struggle for Human Rights,” and I believe that struggle is just as apt today. Because right now, human rights are under assault, all around the world.

Given that this is women’s history month, the plight of women is particularly at the forefront of my mind. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have barred women and girls from getting an education and effectively banned them from public life. Last month, I met a young Afghan refugee whose family has settled in Virginia. She told me how grateful she is to continue her education in the United States, but how painful it is to know that girls in Afghanistan -- including her cousins -- are denied that same opportunity. I promised her the United States will continue to push back against these archaic attacks on universal human rights.

In Iran, we have watched the Iranian people -- led by courageous women -- take to the streets under the banner of “woman, life, and freedom”. For our part, we heeded the calls of activists and worked to kick Iran out of the Commission on the Status of Women. Iran’s presence on the commission was a stain, and we removed it. In the aftermath of the protests, I saw a video of young students in Karaj taking off their hijabs and shouting “If we don’t unite, they will kill us one by one”. If we don’t unite, they will kill us one by one. All around the world women and girls are taking this lesson to heart.

Of course, many other groups and peoples are facing undue persecution. For example, for years, Rohingya and other ethnic minorities have faced human rights abuses in Burma. Now, the military is targeting anyone it sees as opposing or undermining its repressive rule. Meanwhile, the regimes in Syria and in North Korea continue to commit untold human rights abuses against their own people. Nicaragua, Venezuela…the list of countries of concern goes on and on.

But I am particularly concerned by a false and pernicious claim we are seeing pushed forward at the UN and on the Human Rights Council. Some of the planet’s most powerful countries are arguing that human rights are not universal. That instead, they ought to be applied based on the local context. It is no coincidence that these same governments are some of the world’s worst abusers of human rights. China has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. Russian forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine -- and Putin’s government currently has more than 500 political prisoners behind bars.

I call out these two countries, among so many human rights abusers, because both are permanent members of the Security Council along with us. Their influence on the UN system is outsized. And their horrific human rights abuses not only degrade the Council but also allow other countries to get away with flouting human rights too. One of the promises of the UN’s 2030 Agenda is to “leave no one behind”. But if we let the ‘universal’ of ‘universal human rights’ slip, then we do just that.

Fortunately, we have some advantages on our side. And the greatest one is simple: they are wrong. “All human beings,” reads the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This profound statement is not an opinion. It’s a fact. Our human rights are inalienable and indivisible. They are interdependent and interrelated. And they are universal. They do not change from country to country. Dictators abuse human rights. We know all too well how States violate them. But no one -- no one -- can take them away. So, we must stand with human rights defenders, defend them ourselves, and speak out wherever and whenever human rights are being violated or abused. And by the way, that includes here in the United States. We are not above criticism.

I was born in the segregated South. I have known the ugly face of institutional racism. I know all too well that the United States is imperfect when it comes to human rights. But the difference is that we are a democracy. We strive for equality, for transparency. When we make mistakes, we have a system for correction and improvement. And I have seen that system work in my lifetime.

That’s why, in 2021, President Biden issued a formal, standing invitation to all UN experts who report and advise on thematic human rights issues. Since then, we have welcomed the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity to the United States. We issued these invitations because transparency and openness are not threats to our sovereignty.

Rather, our ability to accept critical feedback, and to address enduring injustices and inequities, makes us stronger. It’s the very best of our system. And it gives us a model to hold up for the world. That’s why we rejoined the Human Rights Council -- because even though it is chock full of some of the world’s worst abusers, we can counter them and advance human rights with our seat at the table. It’s why we are the only country in the world that has made a voluntary contribution to support the vital work of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in countering anti-Black discrimination. It’s why we invest more than any other country on earth in helping our fellow UN Member States to provide health care and food security for their populations. It’s why we call out human rights abuses wherever we see them. At home and abroad. With our adversaries as well as our allies. That is what universality demands.

In her speech, Eleanor Roosevelt said that, and I quote, “in each generation and in each country, there must be a continuation of the struggle”. She argued that human rights were, and I quote, “a field in which to stand still is to retreat”. To the students in the room, that’s what I want you to take away from today: in each generation, the struggle continues. Soon, it will be your turn. And standing still is not an option.

Instead, as potential public servants, allow me to enlist you in the struggle. We must subject ourselves, our friends, our foes, and everyone in between to scrutiny. And where we see abuses, and violations, we must push, and prod, and fight for justice. Let us do everything in our power to make our universal rights real, for everyone, all around the world. And let us ensure they are alive and well, even in the small places close to home.

Thank you very much. [Applause.]

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** As I said, President Biden made an inspired and excellent choice. I can't think of a better voice for American values as well as American interests than Linda. I want to thank you very much. I'm going to turn to what the run of show is a little bit, so you know. We're going to have a fireside chat or a moderated conversation. Take your pick. And then there will be questions from the audience, I hope. We're going to be doing it in a slightly different format than we've done before, that instead of having a scrum at the mic, we're going to ask you to raise your hand. I would suggest you use your program and we will bring a mic to you.

To conduct the fireside chat, I'd like to introduce Ambassador Anne Anderson. Anne is the current chair of the ISD board of Advisors and was the ambassador of Ireland and their first woman ambassador to the United States in 2013 to 2017.

She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in history and politics from the University College Dublin, and a diploma in legal studies from King's Inns, Dublin. Her ambassadorial postings include, and these are just the ambassadorships, the Irish Mission to the UN in Geneva, the European Union in Brussels, France, and the United Nations in New York, and as I said, Washington, DC. Her various assignments during these postings included chair of the WTO Trade Policy Review Body, the UN Commission on Human Rights, the head of the Irish team in Brussels during Ireland's EU presidency. She oversaw a review of peacekeeping machinery and in 2018, the UN Secretary General appointed Ambassador Anderson to the fifth advisory group to the United Nations Peacekeeping Fund, a group that she subsequently chaired. During her Washington assignment, Ambassador Anderson focused on furthering and strengthening Irish-US economic trade and investment links, and of course deepening the vibrant cultural connections between our two countries. And a wee bit of an early St. Patrick's Day, Ambassador Anderson. So over to you, please ladies.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Thank you so much, Barbara. Ambassador, it’s a real privilege for me to be conducting this conversation. And I want to start with saying how moved I was by that very inspiring address that you gave. It has a resonance, I think, for everyone in the room.

And Barbara just mentioned that it was actually over 20 years ago that I chaired the Human Rights Council – it was then called the Commission – and there was the same pushback then against the universality of human rights, and it’s so depressing that that pushback has grown even stronger in the intervening years. But it was wonderful to hear that resonant, strong argument that you made, and assertion, and quoting Eleanor Roosevelt.

And it would be very tempting for me to spend the 20 minutes just probing more deeply, but actually what I’d like to do is to maybe adjust the prism a bit and suggest we talk about some of the other issues that are very high on your agenda in New York.

And I want to start with Ukraine, because obviously the horrific war there is at the forefront of all our minds. But I want to talk about it in the UN context and in the – against the kind of backdrop of the workings of UN institutions. And I want to start with the Security Council because, I mean, I’m not suggesting that the Security Council has been redundant; it’s obviously been a platform to talk about Ukraine. It has facilitated a discussion of the General Assembly. But the bottom line, I think, for most people is that – because, of course, of the Russian veto – that it hasn’t been possible for the Security Council to take meaningful action. And I think this has really added to a fairly prevalent cynicism and frustration that you hear about the United Nations and the paralysis at the top.

So, I’d just be really interested: are you encountering those expressions of frustration, and how are you dealing with them?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** I think I hear frustration from those who are not sitting on the Council, but for those who are sitting on the Council, we are resolute in our unified isolation of Russia, and we’ve been able to do it in the context of the Security Council.

But I think even more important than the fact that we isolate them in the Council, we expose them in the Council – because everybody is listening to what is being said there, so they are being exposed – but we’ve also given more strength to the General Assembly, and to take our resolutions – instead of bringing them to the Council and allowing Russia to use their veto power, we’re taking them to the General Assembly. And as you’ve seen over the course of the past year, we have consistently gotten more than 141 countries to condemn Russia’s actions and to show support for Ukraine.

I think Russia is feeling the isolation every single day. They’re feeling the desperation. And we’re seeing in their actions their desperation. They’re bringing really unbelievable people before the Council to speak. One of our Councilmembers said that the Russians have – when they bring clowns into the Council, they turn the Council into a circus. But we’re not going to let them get away with that, because we do bring strong voices into the Council.

And they have to sit and listen to those voices, including the voice of Ukraine.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** I’ll come back, if I may, in a moment to the Security Council and reform and the needed reform, because I think it’s a really important issue. But you mentioned the General Assembly and the voting there. I’m sure we’ve all been following that and it’s consistently sent a strong message.

But I’d just like to pause on it for a moment because the last vote that was held there, which was the first anniversary of the invasion, yes, there were, I think, 141 countries voting in favor of the resolution of support of Ukraine; seven renegades voting against – Russia and six others. There were 32 abstentions, and then 13 countries that I would describe as the cowards who didn’t participate in the vote. But I just – acknowledging that it was a very strong message, I have to say that I was a bit – more than a bit – I was disappointed by some of the countries who abstained: China, India.

Disappointing, but maybe not surprising. But a country like South Africa that would abstain, I mean, what’s South Africa doing by not being in the right company? And I was just, as I say, acknowledging again that it was really a powerful statement of support. I’d love you to take us behind the scenes a bit. I mean, did they U.S. and you personally have to engage in heavy lifting, significant lobbying to help bring about that result? And did you feel any surprise or disappointment about some of the abstentions?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** It did require heavy lifting, but not so heavy because countries really understand that what is happening in Ukraine is an attack on the UN Charter. It’s an attack on everything that we believe in. And it’s an attack on our values. They know that Russia is committing war crimes and human rights abuses.

So, I wouldn’t say it was a heavy lift, but there were countries that were under tremendous pressure – they were under tremendous pressure from Russia; many of them were under pressure from China as well, who did abstain, by the way. And so, we did have to work with those countries to sometimes help get them across the line.

Yes, I’m disappointed in some of the countries that abstained, and I’ll have to have them explain to you what the impetus was for their making those unfortunate decisions, but still only seven countries voted with Russia, including Russia itself. There were some countries who were absent because they didn’t pay their dues, so they weren’t necessarily derelict. One country actually called me at the head-of-state level to say, “We have one person in our mission, and that person happens to be in Addis at the AU summit and I don’t have anyone to sit at the table to vote.”

So, we did reach out to everyone. We – it was a – it really was a unified effort on the part of all of the likeminded countries engaging in these calls. It was Washington engaging at capitals, so it wasn’t just us in New York. It really took – it took a village to deliver on those votes. And I am still very, very proud of the 141 votes that we got, and we will continue to press on countries to see Russia for what Russia is: an international bully, a human rights violator, a war crimes committer, and a country that should be roundly condemned.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Right, and thank you for elucidating in particular – I shouldn’t maybe have called all 13 of them cowards, only some. [Laughter.] But it’s always interesting to hear about the effort that goes on to create these, as you say, very good outcomes.

But I do want to go back to the Security Council, and you talked about Russia sending in the clowns and all of that, but nevertheless, the important work that the Security Council has done on Ukraine. But, I mean, there is the more fundamental issue of Security Council reform. I mean, Ukraine may be Exhibit A in our minds most recently, but I think we’ve all recognized for a long time that basic reform is needed, that the whole setup is anachronistic, reflecting the balance of power in the 1940s rather than the 2020s. But, of course, change is complex and challenging and indeed, many people would say that one of the, if not the biggest obstacle to change is the entrenched privilege of the P5. As you might put it colloquially, it would be like turkeys voting for Christmas because given the power they have, why are they going to give up on any of it?

But I am aware that there has been some evolution in the U.S. position on Security Council reform and I just wonder, how radical is the U.S. prepared to be in the interests of achieving effective reform of the Council?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** I wouldn’t use the word “radical”, but –

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** I was hoping you would. [Laughter.]

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** – but we are serious. We are serious about Security Council reform. We think it’s time. We think the Council does not reflect the realities of the world today.

More than half of the countries who are members of the Security Council, members of the UN now were not even members of the UN when the UN was set up, when the Security Council was created. We think Africa should have a seat on the Security Council.

So what I have been doing since September, I – as you may know, I gave a speech in September in San Francisco to lay out our thinking on where we would go on Security Council reform and I was really pleased when the President amplified that at the High-Level Week in the General Assembly. And since that time, I’ve been on what I have called a listening tour in which I have been meeting with all of the major groupings as well as individual countries to hear what their thoughts are on Security Council reform.

I think there is absolute unanimity on the need for Security Council reform. There’s no dispute on that. How that will come about, there’s a lot of different views on that. And who should be the members are still questions that are being raised. We have committed to using – we’re not going to give up our veto, but we’re committed to using it sparingly, which we have always done. And certainly, Russia and China have not used their veto sparingly. We supported a resolution – in fact, co-sponsored, among many, a resolution headed by Liechtenstein calling for the P5, whenever they use their veto power, to come into the General Assembly to explain and justify the reason they used the veto power.

And we’re looking forward to continuing to engage over the course of the next few weeks and then come up with some recommendations on where we would like to see Security Council reform go. It’s not going to be our decision, let me be clear. It’s not going to be a decision that will kick Russia off the Security Council, because the way the charter was drafted, to kick a country off the Security Council, they have to actually vote for it themselves. And so clearly, Russia is not going to vote itself off of the Security Council.

So, the reality that we are dealing with is that Russia is going to be on the Security Council, but we can look at how we operate. We can look at how we deal with resolutions. We can look at some of the small print. For example, there is – I think it’s 27(c)(3) that requires countries who are engaged in a conflict not to vote on resolutions that apply to them. So, some of those things are being discussed right now. But again, I think the – most of the countries see that we’re serious and we actually pulled away from Russia and China, who did not support any reform whatsoever until they heard that we were looking at reform. And I’ve heard from – that Lavrov has traveled to Africa and indicated that he supports African membership on the Council.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Right. It’s really encouraging to hear that because unless and until some leadership comes from within the P5, it’s going to be all talk and no movement. So I think, really, it would be one of the most transformative and long-term consequential things that could be achieved during your tenure if there could be real momentum and some kind of even incremental outcome in that.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Yes.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Let me turn to China. Obviously, we all know it’s been defined as the key strategic issue for the United States, and I think we all know the policy mix: cooperate where you can; compete, even confront where you must. And we see the out-workings of this kind of escalating tension all the time, and China brokering the agreement in the Middle East last week and the nuclear submarine talks between the AUKUS group yesterday.

But I really wanted to talk about it in the UN context, because I finished my stint as perm rep 10 years ago and at that time, I mean, China obviously had the power that comes with being a P5 member, having the veto. And China would kind of snap into action anytime it felt its immediate and fundamental issue – interests were threatened. But in a lot of areas and for a lot of the time, China was actually very low-key.

Now, my understanding and my sense is that has really changed over the last 10 years, and I think it was Tony Blinken who recently referred to aggressive multilateralism, and there’s a sense that China is flexing its muscles right across the UN system. Are you encountering that? And if so, how are – how is the U.S. responding to that?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Well, first, when you leave space unfilled, someone will come and fill the space. And we saw that happen during the previous administration, that there were a lot of gaps and a lot of space that we didn’t hold on to. And China whipped into action and started moving into empty spaces and they did start to flex their muscles.

And I will say that one of the most shocking things that I saw when I arrived was how close – I wasn’t prepared, I will admit, for how close a relationship China and Russia had. Despite the fact that there are differences and there are competing interests, they signed a blood pact that they were going to be tight and support each other’s interest. And that’s required us to up our game, and we have. We have upped our game. We have asserted our leadership. And we have continued to assert our values as China has attempted to really reshape the international order in their own image, meeting their own national interests. And it requires a tremendous amount of effort on our part.

I mean, when I arrived in New York, I had 30 percent less staff than I should have had. The positions were there. They were not filled. We have not been paying our dues. So that gives China a lot more power than they might have had otherwise. We’re a billion dollars in arrears that we absolutely have to pay. China uses every opportunity, every opportunity that they can find to dig at us because of our arrears.

We’re still the largest funder of the UN. We still are the largest humanitarian donor. We still have a lot of clout. But we have to exert that clout, to exert that power; to give our voice the power that we need, we have to be more consistent in how we deal with the United Nations, how we pay our dues, how we give resources to USUN, to have people who are working all night to go through the UN documents to make sure there’s not language in these documents that we find objectionable, such as taking out “universal” from human rights.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Sure, yeah. So, upping your game, as we know –

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** – under your leadership is happening, but a continuing challenge.

Let me – I really wouldn’t want to – I better keep an eye on the time or I’ll be in trouble with Barbara. It’s so interesting. I wish we had two hours instead of 20 minutes. But we do need to talk about Africa. And obviously, we heard and we know from your life experience and your CV that absolute fundamental commitment you have to Africa. And I’m not suggesting for a moment that Africa is being neglected. We know the huge effort the UN makes across the board there. We know your personal commitment, including your visits when you’ve been perm rep. First Lady Jill Biden was there just a couple of weeks ago.

But – and I do have a sort of a little bit of a “nevertheless” here because my sense from some engagement – it’s limited, so you’ll correct me – but my sense from some engagement with African countries is that they are feeling what I might call a relative de-prioritization when they contrast their situation with what’s happening in Ukraine and the Western commitment to give as much as is needed for as long as it takes.

And they see their own dire situation, and indeed, some of the conflict there that’s already exacerbated by climate change and so on, in some cases being made worse by the food shortages resulting from Ukraine. And there is that kind of uneasy feeling, and I don’t want to exaggerate this, but perhaps an uneasy feeling that when it comes right down to it, European lives matter and white lives matter more than African lives matter. And I just wondered, again, are you sensing any of this? And if so, what do you say to any such expression?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** I sense it. It’s also part of the Russian propaganda narrative as well – as they engage with people in Africa. And what I have said to my African colleagues is there has never – the U.S. has never ever turned its back on Africa. Even during the previous administration when some countries were referred to in a derogatory way, our support in Africa has been wide-ranging.

When I look at during the Bush administration, the kinds of initiatives that still exist today – from the Malaria Initiative, PEPFAR, Millennium Challenge Corporation – all of these initiatives where we have focused attention on Africa never ever stopped. And when they say to us white lives matter more than African lives matter, I have to remind them that what is happening in Ukraine is on Europe’s border. So, Europeans are fighting for their own lives, because if Ukraine falls, who knows who will come next? And this is not about just fighting for European lives; it’s fighting for the values of the UN Charter that says a bully can’t attack its neighbor and attack their sovereignty and compromise a country’s independence.

So, it’s about them as well, and it’s really, in my view, simplistic to say this is a white-and-black situation, because it’s not. And as I have said to my African friends, if this was an attack on an African country, the way this attack happened on Ukraine, we would be there for them. And we’ve not decreased any of our support. I mean, every single time I’ve gone we’re making huge contributions to the approaching famine in Somalia. It was because of nearly a billion dollars that we provided, that we actually averted a famine last year, and we’re giving more funding this year, and I did call for additional support to address those issues.

We were the largest donor of vaccines to Africa. We were slow off the mark, like everybody was slow off the mark, but when we took off, we took off aggressively to ensure that we got vaccines delivered to the continent and we got them put in arms. And we’re working with countries to address what we all saw: the lack of capacity to develop the vaccines on the continent of Africa.

So I dispute the comments that we have left Africa. We need to do more. President Biden committed to that during the African Leaders Summit. It was not just my trip to Africa. Janet Yellen was on the continent; the First Lady; Secretary Blinken is there right now; there are other visitors that are in planning over the course of the next few weeks and months to really ramp up our engagement with the continent and address this counternarrative that somehow we have forgotten about the continent.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Right. And I’m sure that reassurance coming from you must be particularly meaningful, simply because of the – it’s not a newfound commitment to Africa. Like we said, it’s been lifelong. But still, I wish fewer African countries had understood and fewer had abstained on the Ukraine vote.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Yes.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** In any event, I’m going to come to my final question. That was a terrific article that you and Bill Burns co-authored in Foreign Affairs two years ago about – I think it was “The Transformation of Diplomacy.”

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Yeah.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** And the subtitle was even more arresting: “How to Save the State Department.” And what you laid out there was very sobering because, of course, everything got worse through the malevolence of the Trump administration vis-à-vis the State Department, but you were making the point that this came after decades of drift and paralysis and neglect.

So obviously, we know things have greatly improved over the last couple of years, but how do you reverse decades-long damage in a couple of years? So I suppose that’s my final question: Is the State Department anywhere close to being saved?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** You cannot address decades of neglect in a couple of years. But you can address it by a strong commitment, which we have at this point. We see the commitment that the Secretary and management in the State Department has made to dealing with issues of diversity and inclusion, dealing with recruiting and bringing in new staff, looking at promotions, looking at how we support our staff. Because we can recruit people, but we’re still sieving them because they don’t – they didn’t feel they were getting the support that they needed.

And all of those are being looked at at the moment, and new policies are being put in place so that all of the young people in this room can see the State Department as a career that you want to be part of. I came into the Foreign Service in 1982 with the goal that if I stayed 20 years, I would be – I would have achieved a goal. I had no clue 40 years later I would still be sitting in the State Department.

But it’s been an extraordinarily rewarding career for me. I feel every day that I make a difference in people’s lives, whether it’s a difference in your lives here in the room, or it’s a difference in the lives of refugees that I’m encountering in my travel, or it’s a difference in the lives of my contacts, diplomatic contacts, with various countries. And you know every day that what you’re doing is going to make – it’s going to make a huge difference, that you’re contributing to the future.

And I know that we have to do a better job, which is why we talked about reinventing the State Department, so that your generation can feel the same commitment, the same confidence in public service as we felt coming into the Foreign Service 40 years ago. Bill and I actually came into the Foreign Service together, so we’ve spent these 40 years watching the system together. And we know that we had different paths. And one of the things we looked at is we questioned why he and I had different paths, and what changes can be made so that people who look like me and who look like him have the same path moving forward.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Well, thank you so much, Ambassador, and that’s, I think, why we’re so thrilled to give you this award today, because we do know that you are, every day, making a real difference in the lives of real people in many parts of the world. So, with that, I think I’m going to turn it back to our moderator. And thank you so much, Ambassador.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Thank you.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** It was really wonderful talking with you.

**Ambassador Anne Anderson:** Thank you. [Applause.]

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Now we’d like to take questions from the audience, particularly the students, who are our primary audience here today. So, if you could just kind of wave your program so I can see it with the glare of lights. Yes, ma’am, first one up. Oh, wait. Wait for the microphone to get to you. And identify yourself, please.

**Student:** Hi. I’m Charlie Kelly. I am currently a second-year Asian studies student and a proud class of 2018 as well for the SFS. My question is about sort of – it’s been 50 years since UN Resolution 2158 – or 2578. I really tried to get that right. [Laughter.]

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** That’s okay.

**Student:** Sort of switched recognition between China and Taiwan at the UN. And I just am curious, is there any space for Taiwan at the UN and its sub-organizations? And can the UN do anything if there is any sort of Taiwan Straits crisis or conflict?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** That’s an issue that I am engaged on every single day, and that is to work to allow Taiwan to get – to be allowed to participate in any UN activity, any UN meeting, that does not require them to have the title of Member State. And it’s an uphill battle every single day. I think as people are watching the situation now in the Taiwan Straits, they are worried. But our policy, the U.S. policy, has been consistent. We support a “one China” policy, but we are absolutely clear that we will always support – be there to give Taiwan support to defend itself if there are attacks on Taiwan.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Next? The gentleman in the green, and then I do see the other two, and I do see you over here. You are right smack in the lights, but I do see you.

**Student:** Hi. I’m Jack Silverman, and I’m a sophomore in the SFS. And I wanted to ask: How can the United States enhance collaboration and unity among the world’s democracies that often aren’t always in lockstep? And I’m specifically referencing some democracies in Latin America and in Africa, who we haven’t really been able to muster the same unity and support that we have in Western Europe.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Thank you so much for that question. I will be headed out in about a week to Costa Rica, heading the U.S. delegation to the Summit of Democracies being hosted in Latin America by Costa Rica. There is a Summit of Democracy in Zambia being hosted at exactly the same time. And Secretary Buttigieg I think is going to be our, heading our delegation. I don’t know if that’s public, so I probably shouldn’t have said that, but –

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** We’ll take it out of the tape. We’ll take it out of the tape.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** I think we will be sending a head of delegation – [laughter] – to Zambia. So, we’re bringing countries together. We hosted a summit of democracies here in Washington the first year of the administration. We’ve taken it out regionally, and then we’ll bring it back in again. And we think it is truly important that those countries that are democracies, that they get the support from larger and longer democracies, and I think we’re going to see more of that in the future.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** And I said I saw one there, one – the woman there and the woman there. And then I’ll pick up the next round.

**Student:** Hello, Ambassador. It is such an honor to be here with you today. Thank you so much. You mentioned the surprisingly close relationship that you saw between Russia and China. And my question is: In the United Nations, does the U.S. have similarly unconditionally close alliances with any countries? And if we do not, what can we do to ensure that we can increase the number of those types of alliances with other countries so that we’re not necessarily having to battle China and Russia on our own? Thank you.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** We’re never isolated. I can be clear on that. We are never isolated. We work closely with our P3 colleagues, the UK and France. Europe and the U.S. have never been more unified over Ukraine. In fact, Putin’s miscalculation was that he was going to divide Europe on Ukraine, and he failed miserably on that. NATO has never been stronger.

So we do have strong alliances, strong friendships across the UN system. And we bring those alliances and those friendships to the fore when we need them.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Okay. And as I said, I think the woman there, I think. There’s one downside of this format is that I’m staring into the most remarkable lights.

**Student:** Hello, Ambassador. Thank you so much for being here with us. I’m a first-year in the MSFS program. My name is Kira, and my focus is on climate policy in diplomacy. And I know that you care a great deal about migration issues and refugee crises around the world, and my question is: As it currently stands, there’s no international legal definition of a climate refugee, and thus they have no rights in, like, international, like, legal standard. And I’m curious if that is a discussion that is being had in the UN right now because from my understanding, it is way behind where it should be in the conversation, considering how big of a refugee crisis this will be in the coming years. And so I’m just curious to hear your thoughts on that.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** It is a discussion that is taking place at the United Nations. Sometimes we fight an uphill battle, so several countries – Niger, for example – brought before the Security Council, when they were an elected member, a discussion about conflict and climate. Because a lot of times when you see people move, they’re moving also – it’s connected to climate but it’s also connected to conflict.

And unfortunately, their resolution was not supported by, of course, Russia and China, but there have been efforts to move that agenda forward. And how we address people who move because of climate, I think it’s also an issue that we are working to figure out how we bring into our discussions related to refugees, because the Geneva Conventions are very clear about refugees.

But I don’t think – as people are moving, many of them don’t necessarily move across borders. They become IDPs in their countries, and they are supported through programs that support IDPs – our humanitarian programs, for example; what we were able to do in Somalia to address the famine and address people who were forced to move from their homes because of famine. So, it is an ongoing issue, it’s an ongoing problem, but it’s not something that we’re ignoring.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Okay. There was the woman back here who is – yes. Thank you.

**Student:** Hi, Ambassador. I’m Maggie. I’m a senior currently in the College. Thank you so much for coming and speaking. I had some questions just recently related to the UN resolution that you mentioned that 140 countries signed up on, and one of those was Singapore, but there were some articles that I had read recently that talked about how there’s actually discovery of – that Singaporean companies were remixing Russian oil in the Singapore Strait, among several other countries, although – and it was especially surprising because they’ve taken independent measures to sanction Russia.

So I was wondering, given the sort of, like, disappointing outcome, whether you had any thoughts about the use of UN – or, like, the use of methods within the UN to possibly, like, signal and the difference between that and, like, having efficient mechanisms of actually preventing Russia from exporting oil and from gaining, and also whether the UN should as a result partner more with organizations – perhaps, like, domestically the U.S. Treasury – outside commercial organizations, or even, like, statutorily established organizations like the ICC that have more enforcement mechanisms.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** We – there are a number of countries that we know are still importing cheap oil from Russia, and there are even – there’s still oil being exported into European countries, and we’ve been working with a number of countries to help them find ways or other alternatives to using Russian oil. We are prepared, if we need to at some point, to impose sanctions on some countries, but we think the best alternative here is to help them find alternative oil resources.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Okay, I’m going to take three questions. Oh, dear. What are you doing? We just can stay here till about 10 o’clock answering questions.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** I’m good. I’m good. I do that every night in New York. [Laughter.]

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Yeah, that’s true. [Laughter.] I hate this part of the job. I’m going to take the one way back there and the one way in the back and that one right – this lady right here. Sorry. So there you go.

**Student:** Hello, Ambassador. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Jack, and my question is: How does soft power diplomacy continue to function as an effective tool when, as you mentioned, China and Russia are making entire regions unstable and volatile? For example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine endangers organizations like the Peace Corps in not just Ukraine but all of Eastern Europe as well.

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** We still have to use our soft power, and we still use that soft power. I mean, we – Peace Corps – I love the fact that you mentioned Peace Corps, because for me Peace Corps is one of the most important presences that we have overseas in terms of American – America showing its values and its soft power, but we also don’t want to put people’s lives in danger.

But we have other ways of showing our soft power as well. We show it when we’re sitting in New York, and we kick Iran off of the Commission on the Status of Women. We show our soft power in our ability to kick Russia off of the Human Rights Council, and people look to see those actions. They want to hear our voices. They want to hear our calls for unity against Russia.

So, while we can’t have maybe people on the ground, but we’re using our soft power elsewhere. We use it when we send humanitarian assistance to the world. Going into Ukraine, my visit – and, I mean, the President’s visit was amazing, but my visit to Ukraine was an amazing experience for me, but the message it sent to the Ukrainian people was that we’ve not forgotten them. We’re not ignoring them. We’re willing to take risks to come to Ukraine to support people who are in need.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Okay, and there was one in the back. Thank you. And then there’s you up front.

**Student:** Thank you so much, Ambassador. My name is Ben and I’m a second-year student majoring in African Studies. In 2019, you gave a speech where you said that Chinese lending could be part of a win-win-win situation for Africa, the U.S., and China. However, in an interview last month, you criticized China’s lending in Africa as a debt trap, accusing China of, quote, “coming in and re-indebting African countries.” However, in your 2019 speech, you noted that, quote, “those who criticize China’s lending must also acknowledge that in many cases, the West is not showing up and offering viable alternatives,” unquote.

How do you respond to this criticism of U.S. – of the U.S. stance on China in Africa, which says that (a) there’re often not viable alternative infrastructure financing alternatives for African countries, and that (b) blaming China for Africa’s debt problem obscures the fact that a much larger portion of Africa’s debt is held by private Western commercial lenders that typically charge higher interest?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Look, Africans – [laughter,] – their infrastructure needs are extraordinary when you look at ports and airports and roads, and what we need to be doing in terms of working with Africans is giving them the capacity to not allow themselves to be put in a debt trap to get the resources that they need. And so my arguments today in criticizing China is there was never a thought in my mind that the debt that they were putting Africans in, is something that should be allowed, but what we should be doing is working with Africans so they’re not in a debt trap. So yeah, they get a loan or an offer for infrastructure from China, but it should not be done to their disadvantage.

And that’s what is happening. We’re looking at countries like Ghana, Zambia right now, even in Sri Lanka, where China has put these countries into really an unsustainable economic situation. And so we need to help those countries find alternatives so that they’re not put in that situation. And we can’t tell them – and they will tell us, you can’t tell us that we can’t get roads and we can’t get bridges and we can’t get airports, but help us find a way to get those things without the disadvantages of being really put under the yoke of Chinese debt.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** Okay. And the young woman up front. And you have the last question, so –

**Student:** Madam Ambassador, congratulations on your award, and thank you for being here with us today. I’m Angela Chin. I’m a 2021 Charles B. Rangel fellow and in the Master of Science in Foreign Service program. I’m also completing –

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Good, congratulations.

**Student:** Oh, thank you. I’m also completing the African Studies certificate program. And there is a pervasive narrative in the Foreign Service that if, as a young professional, you start your career in Africa, that you might be pigeonholed and it will stunt your growth. I can look around at other of my colleagues here that have heard this advice. They’re nodding along. Clearly, your career is not an example of that, but how can we counteract this narrative and ensure that Africa is something – is a place that’s seen as important to U.S. foreign policy and ensure that we prioritize it within our own careers?

**Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield:** Thank you so much for asking me that question. I never felt pigeonholed in Africa. I studied Africa, so why wouldn’t I not go to Africa in the Foreign Service? The pigeonhole argument was probably a generation before me, when we look at African Americans who – many of whom came into the Foreign Service in the ’60s and maybe in the early ’70s where they can only get an assignment in Africa, but you can also make the choice. And I would have found it odd that, having studied in Africa and done research in Liberia, that I would be sent to China. Whereas no one raises that question if you are studying Chinese, Asian politics that you go to China. But you shouldn’t be forced to go because you’re an Asian American or you shouldn’t be forced to go to Africa if you are an African American.

And I don’t think that’s happening in the Foreign Service anymore at all. It is needs of the service. You’ll bid; you’ll probably get sent somewhere you don’t want to get sent. [Laughter.] My first assignment, I desperately wanted to go to Burkina Faso and I was sent to Jamaica, and it was not – for me it was not being pigeonholed, it was actually following my passion.

**Ambassador (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine:** I would love to be able to stay here much longer, but we do have to wrap this up. I would invite Joel and Frank to come up here. We’re going to actually present you with the Jit Trainor Award. And I'm gonna have Anne, you all,

and gentlemen, ladies, all of you go over there. Stage managing. Because I'm going to read this citation because it's way too little otherwise. This is the J. Raymond “Jit” Trainor Award for Excellence in the Conduct of Diplomacy presented to Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield in recognition of her nearly four decades of public service as a career member of the Foreign Service and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Throughout her career, she has consistently demonstrated courage, intelligence, personal integrity, and the highest standards of professionalism in the most challenging posts and on the most intractable issues. She has put the interest of her country and the needs of the world's most vulnerable first while maintaining her grace, her sense of humor, and most importantly a commitment to do what is right. Linda, thank you, and congratulations. [Applause.]