

Panelist Biographies



Inclusive Diplomacy: Former Directors General's Perspectives

April 22, 2021 | 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm ET

Free Virtual Conversation

[Register on Zoom](#)



The Honorable Arnold Chacon

Ambassador Arnold Chacon joined the National Defense University (NDU) as senior vice president in August 2018. He is an active service career member of the US Foreign Service and holds the rank of career minister. Prior to NDU, Ambassador Chacon served as diplomat in residence at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has held senior leadership positions in the US Department of State, including chief of mission in Guatemala and the State Department's chief human capital officer.

As director general of the Foreign Service from 2014 to 2017, Ambassador Chacon developed strategic guidance for the Global Talent Management Bureau of 900 employees who carry out the full range of human resources activities for the State Department's 75,000 worldwide workforce.

As ambassador to Guatemala from 2011 to 2014, he implemented one of the largest economic development, counter-narcotics, and rule of law programs in Latin America. His other diplomatic assignments include postings to US missions in Spain, Italy, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, and the United Nations. He also served as the deputy executive secretary of the State Department's Executive Secretariat and in the Bureaus of European Affairs and Western Hemisphere Affairs. A life member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Ambassador Chacon has received numerous leadership awards, including two Presidential Merit Rank Awards. His wife Alida is retired from the Foreign Service. They have three children.



The Honorable Ruth A. Davis

Ambassador Ruth Davis is a career ambassador with a 40-year career in the Foreign Service. She served as chief of staff in the Africa Bureau (2005-2009), distinguished advisor for international affairs at Howard University (2003-2005), director general of the Foreign Service and director of human resources (2001-2003), director of the Foreign Service Institute (1997-2001), principal deputy assistant secretary for consular affairs (1995-1997), ambassador to the Republic of Benin (1992-1995), consul general in Barcelona (1987-1991), and a consular officer in nations around the globe. She established the Foreign Service Institute's School of Leadership and Management in 1999, improved crisis management instruction and training for Locally Employed Staff, and led the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative that boosted Foreign Service hiring. She has also helped increase diversity in the Foreign Service, particularly as president and adviser to the Thursday Luncheon Group.

Since her retirement in 2009, Ambassador Davis has served as the chair (and a founding member) of the International Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge. She also chairs the selection committee for the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Fellowship at Howard University's Ralph Bunche International Affairs Center. Finally, as vice president of the Association of Black American Ambassadors, she participates in activities involving the recruitment, preparation, hiring, retention, mentoring, and promotion of minority Foreign Service employees. Ambassador Davis currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Diplomacy Center Foundation, the Senior Seminar Alumni Association, and the Advisory Council of the Foreign Service Youth Foundation. She is vice president of the Washington Institute of Foreign Affairs, president of the International Mission of Mercy, USA, and chair of the International Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge. She also acts as a senior adviser to the Thursday Luncheon Group and the International Career Advancement Program at the University of Denver.

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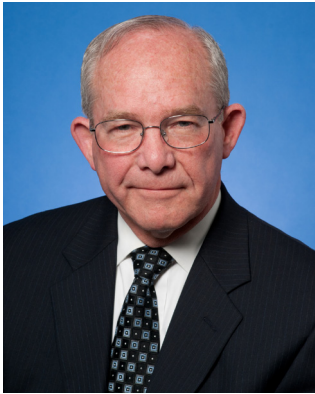


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The Honorable Edward Gnehm, Jr.

Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm, Jr., (ret.) is currently the Kuwait Professor of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Affairs and the director of the Middle East Policy Forum at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

Prior to coming to the Elliott School, Ambassador Gnehm had a distinguished 36-year career in the Foreign Service. He was a member of the Senior Foreign Service and held the rank of career minister. He served as the US ambassador to Jordan (2001-2004), Australia (2000-2001), and Kuwait (1991-1994). In addition, he served as the US deputy permanent representative to the United Nations (1994-1997) and director general of the Foreign Service (1997-2000).

Ambassador Gnehm attended the George Washington University, graduating with a BA in 1966 and an MA in 1968.



Dr. Michael Krenn

Moderator

Michael L. Krenn is professor of history at Appalachian State University. He received his PhD from Rutgers University in 1985. He has published six books, including *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (2005), *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (2006), and *The History of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy: From 1770 to the Present Day* (2017). Currently, he is serving as advisor for a documentary based on his 1999 book, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-69*. He is also working on a biography of Dr. Samuel George Morton, a 19th-century Philadelphia physician who collected nearly 1000 human skulls for his studies of race and culture.



The Honorable Mattie R. Sharpless

Ambassador Mattie R. Sharpless, an independent consultant, works to expand US/African agribusiness trade and investment. After a distinguished 41-year career in the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and as a charter member of the US Trade Representative's Trade Advisory Committee on Africa, she closely monitors and fosters US/African agribusiness policies and trade relations.

As US ambassador to the Central African Republic (2001-2003), she gave priority emphasis to sustenance agricultural development. She served as FAS' acting administrator during the transition of Presidents Clinton and Bush Administrations, managing over 1,000 employees worldwide and a \$100 million+ budget. She served as the Agricultural minister counselor, agricultural counselor, or agricultural attaché at the US Embassy Paris, France; Rome, Italy; and at the US Mission to the

European Union in Brussels, Belgium. She also served as administrative assistant at the US Mission to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, France, and in numerous senior positions at USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC.

A native of Hampstead, North Carolina, Ambassador Sharpless actively participates in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., The Pearl and Ivy Educational Foundation, Inc., the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc., the Association of Black American Ambassadors, the DACOR House Foundation, the American Academy of Diplomacy, Washington Institute of Foreign Affairs, and the North Carolina Central University Alumni Association, among others.

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The Honorable Harry K. Thomas, Jr.

Ambassador Harry Thomas is one of our nation's most experienced diplomats and holds the State Department's rank of career minister. Over his 30-year career, he has represented the United States abroad as ambassador three times and served in senior positions at the State Department and the White House.

As ambassador to Zimbabwe from 2016 to 2018, Harry led US efforts to support economic reform, democracy, and American corporations seeking to do business in Zimbabwe. He oversaw EducationUSA, which sends several hundred students to American universities each year and partners with NGOs to gain academic and athletic scholarships for Zimbabweans. As ambassador to the Philippines from 2010 to 2013, Harry led US assistance during the Philippines' devastating floods and managed the US efforts to eliminate terrorism. He headed one of the United States'

largest diplomatic missions with over 3,000 staff.

Harry was the director general of the Foreign Service and head of human resources from 2007 to 2009. He previously served as Department of State executive secretary and on the national security staff at the White House. He holds a bachelor's degree from Holy Cross and a master's degree from Columbia University. He speaks Spanish and Hindi, as well as some Bengali and Tagalog.

Additional Guests



James T. L. Dandridge

Vice Chairman, Diplomacy Center Foundation Board of Directors



Dr. Jane Carpenter-Rock

Acting Director, National Museum of American Diplomacy