STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
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FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR
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I am grateful to be here as President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

Madam Chairman, you probably do not remember this, but you were present the first time I ever appeared before a Congressional Committee. I was 20 years old and a student at UC Berkeley. You were a member of the House Budget Committee under Chairman Bill Gray, and you recruited me to testify about federal funding for student financial aid. I was terrified. But you were encouraging. And when I was done, you said you'd send my testimony to President Reagan, and, better yet, put it in the Congressional Record, which, for a nerdy kid like me was like having a record on the pop charts. That experience helped give me the confidence to go into public life. So I might not be here if not for you.

Three years ago, speaking to the United Nations, President Obama said that "part of the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others." To be asked by the president to help him and Secretary Kerry give life to that conviction is the greatest honor of my career.

It is also a singular honor to be nominated for this position by President Obama while being introduced by Senator McCain. I take this as a reminder that the cause of human rights unites Americans, no matter what party we belong to or how much we argue about the issues of the day. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to deepen the bipartisan consensus for America's defense of liberty around the world, and to conduct myself in that spirit at all times.

Senator McCain, as you can imagine, people who know my political affiliation sometimes ask me, how come I get along with you so well? I recently thought of an image that sums up why that is better than any recitation of what we've worked on together. It came to me in the instant after a terrible moment in our recent history, the bombing at the Boston Marathon. Like most Americans, I watched the scenes of what happened that day on television. And I noticed something amazing: while most of the people there naturally ran away from the blast, a few ran right towards it. They could not have known what had happened or how much danger they were in; they just knew instinctively that somewhere in the smoke and chaos people needed their help. And that's how I look at you, Senator. You run straight at the hardest problems, even when the risks are high and immediate rewards small. You may have noticed that sometimes, when we run towards trouble, we get in trouble. But you also know that this approach to life is more rewarding and honorable than its alternative.

I think that image captures our country in its finest moments as well. It explains the America that gave so much to rebuild Europe and Japan after WWII, the America that stood up for the enduring struggles of Baltic independence movements and of Burmese democrats and of those seeking freedom in Libya, the America that takes in refugees from repression and war even when it offends governments with which we must do business, the America that tries to make peace where it might be easier to disengage and resign ourselves to perpetual conflict, as former Senator Feingold will be doing in Central Africa and Secretary Kerry is doing in the Middle East. It describes us today, debating how to aid Syrians being killed by a brutal dictator – wherever that debate leads us, the mere fact we are having it marks our nation as exceptional.

That's the America I grew up admiring, as an immigrant from Poland who'd seen how powerless people behind the Iron Curtain drew strength from having the world's most powerful country on their side. In my life, nothing has made me prouder than standing with President Clinton in Warsaw celebrating with Poles their admission to NATO, the culmination of what many thought a quixotic American quest to free Europe's captive nations, or going to Sarajevo and seeing that city restored to life after America helped end the genocide in Bosnia, or going to Burma last year and greeting activists just released from prison who credited America for their freedom. Those moments aside, I have found nothing harder than hearing people in other, still-troubled places ask me "why can't your country help end the repression in ours?" – whether refugees from North Korea, Tibetan Chinese exiles, or the Syrians I met last year in the Aleppo countryside, who would come out of their homes when they learned I was American to plead for our assistance. How do you explain to someone in that situation the undeniable truth that we cannot be there for everyone every time? It's troubling to see their disappointment sometimes morph into resentment against the United States. But we should remember that such anger is often nothing more than the flip side of hope that we will do more to live up to our highest ideals, which are reflected in the world's expectations of us. It is a measure of our importance, and a reminder that the blessings of being American are inseparable from its burdens.

All around the world, I think people have this in common: they don't want to live unnaturally, in fear, denied basic freedom and dignity. When people are forced to live this way, they eventually resist. That resistance, as we have seen from the fall of the Soviet Empire to the start of the Arab Awakening, drives history. And because of who we are, they expect the United States to stand with them. We cannot always respond as they wish. But when we vindicate their faith in us by defending the ideals we share with them, we emerge stronger and better able to advance our national interests. We gain allies of an enduring, not transactional, nature. We project confidence in ourselves. We promote the ascendance of ideas, institutions and leaders that make the world more peaceful, prosperous and welcoming of American leadership. Even if I didn't care about right and wrong, I would argue that advancing democratic ideals and human rights is one of our paramount interests. Our commitment to live by and promote those values is our comparative advantage, a strategic asset as worthy of protection as our military strength and economic base. These are some of the convictions that will guide me if I am confirmed.

There are many challenges I hope we will have a chance to work on together. Looking ahead, here are a few key questions on my mind:

How can we counter the global crackdown on civil society – the proliferation, from Russia to parts of the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa, of laws and practices aimed at making it impossible to form and fund independent organizations that hold governments accountable? By the same token, how can we best ensure that countries moving away from authoritarianism, such as Burma, continue to do so?

How can we increase the likelihood that the Arab Awakening will lead to stability and respect for human rights for all, rather than conflict, suppression of women and religious minorities, and a return to authoritarianism? There are distinct challenges in Tunisia, which has made progress that must be sustained; in Libya, where a society eager for democracy and partnership with us is threatened by armed militias; in Yemen, where an inclusive National Dialogue is underway; in Egypt, where a full return to democracy and civilian rule is vital to giving everyone in that polarized country a stake in non-violent politics; in Bahrain, where we must keep pressing for a political compromise that avoids deeper instability and protects human rights, and of course in Syria, where a chance for success in preventing massacres by Sarin gas should increase our determination to stop mass murder by bullets, bombs, artillery, and deprivation.

How can we best contribute to the debate underway in the world's emerging powers about the values they will embrace and project as they grow in influence? This question is especially important with respect to China, where more and more people are asking for greater political openness, freedom of conscience, and respect for the rule of law, but a significant crackdown on dissent is underway.

As we diminish our military presence in Afghanistan, how can we ensure that fragile gains for human rights continue? I am particularly determined that we meet our responsibility to Afghan women, and press the Afghan government to do the same, remembering that there is a strong correlation between advances for security in Afghanistan and advances for women's rights.

Cyberspace has been key to many recent advances. It is the strategic space where a growing proportion of the world's people exchange goods and ideas, and it has been governed by values very consistent with our own. The multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance has helped to preserve, enhance, and increase an open, global Internet. We have a stake in keeping it that way, and ensuring that global citizens continue to enjoy the same freedoms on-line as they do off-line. How can we best continue to promote the multi-stakeholder governance model while forging a strategy for cyberspace stewardship that protects privacy and enhances security?

More broadly, when we face tough questions on issues like detention, surveillance, and targeted action against terrorists, how can we continue to protect our security while reinforcing our message to the world about liberty and law?

Let me close with a final point: When we confront painful human rights problems around the world, whether in Syria or Zimbabwe or Cuba or North Korea, it is tempting

to say things like “we have no good options,” and “our influence is limited.” If I’m confirmed, I will try my best to avoid such phrases. After all, our influence is never unlimited. And if a problem has reached the desks of senior officials in our government, that probably means the solutions are not obvious or require hard trade offs. The job of a State Department official is to figure out how to use limited influence to address those tough challenges, building coalitions inside and outside of government, recognizing that we may sometimes fail but must always try.

It is America’s potential, not our past, that gives me confidence in what we can achieve if we do try. We are and will remain for the foreseeable future the most wealthy, powerful, creative, resilient, adaptive country on earth. Despite our domestic challenges and healthy wariness of foreign entanglements, we are still the best hope for people struggling for human rights around the world, and their success is still our best hope for the world we want. If confirmed, I look forward to working with each of you to help ensure that we continue to realize that hope.