

**Statement of Daniel J. Kritenbrink
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 27, 2017**

Thank you Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee for the honor of allowing me to testify before you, and for considering my nomination by the President to be the next United States Ambassador to Vietnam. I am deeply grateful for the confidence that President Trump and Secretary Tillerson have shown in me. I would also like to thank my wife Nami, and my children, Mia and Joseph, for joining me today. Their love has been a constant source of support and encouragement, without which I would not be here.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Senate to advance American interests and build upon the already strong ties between the United States and Vietnam.

It has always been my dream to serve my country, and I have been privileged to do so as a State Department Foreign Service Officer since 1994. I have spent most of my career in Asia, including in a variety of leadership positions. I know how critical this dynamic region is to U.S. interests. Few countries highlight the impact of consistent, creative U.S. engagement in Asia more than Vietnam. That is something I witnessed firsthand during my previous work with the Vietnamese, including three official trips to Vietnam, and my overseeing the negotiation of two bilateral Joint Statements with Vietnam in 2015 and 2016.

Over the last 40 years, the U.S.-Vietnam relationship has undergone a profound transformation. Thanks to the efforts of successive U.S. administrations, the Congress, and others, such as veterans, the business community, and members from among the more than two million Vietnamese-Americans, Vietnam has become a valuable and strategic partner. If confirmed, I will work to continue developing the U.S.-Vietnam relationship in support of a wide range of shared interests, including in the following areas.

First, security. Our two countries have significantly expanded security cooperation, including through U.S. support to strengthen Vietnam's maritime security capabilities, as part of our shared interest in upholding international law and resisting coercion in the South China Sea, a region vital to our respective security and commercial interests as Asia-Pacific nations. We are also helping Vietnam build capacity to become a more responsible and active contributor on the

regional and global stage. We are encouraging Vietnam to continue its active role within ASEAN, and we support Vietnam's planned contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. The United States and Vietnam have also increased collaboration on preventing North Korea from threatening the region through its nuclear and missile programs. If confirmed, I will continue this vital work.

Second, trade and investment. Bilateral trade with Vietnam has grown exponentially, increasing from \$451 million in 1995 to \$52 billion in 2016. Last year, Vietnam was America's fastest growing export market. U.S. investment in Vietnam has grown to \$1.5 billion. Yet challenges obviously remain. If confirmed, I will work to boost U.S. exports and expand trade and investment ties. I will also advocate for a level playing field for U.S. companies and investors, including by urging Vietnam to improve labor and environmental standards, transparency for state-owned enterprises, and intellectual property protection, so that our two countries enjoy a strong trade relationship that is free and fair.

Third, human rights. There has been some progress in Vietnam on human rights and religious freedom in recent years, due in no small part to Congressional engagement and a productive bilateral dialogue on these issues. However, the trend over the past 18 months of increased arrests, convictions, and harsh sentences of activists is deeply troubling. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for human rights and religious freedom, and for the need to make further progress in combating trafficking in persons, while stressing to Vietnam's leadership that progress on these issues remains a top priority for the United States, and is critical to enabling our partnership – and Vietnam itself – to reach its fullest potential.

Fourth, people-to-people ties. The bonds between the American and Vietnamese people are strong and growing. More than 21,000 Vietnamese now study in the United States, placing Vietnam in the top six source countries for foreign students. These students not only build mutual understanding, but they also contributed nearly \$700 million to the U.S. economy in 2015. Over 80,000 Vietnamese visited the United States last year, supporting American jobs in every state, and over half a million Americans visited Vietnam. The new Fulbright University Vietnam and the Peace Corps program in Vietnam will further deepen these ties that will serve as the bridge to our brighter future together.

Fifth, humanitarian and war legacy issues. Providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War era remains our solemn obligation, and we must not stop until that work is complete. Vietnam has provided critical assistance to those efforts for decades. Since 1993, the United

States has contributed over \$103 million to mitigate lingering threats posed by unexploded ordnance. We have invested nearly \$115 million in the remediation of dioxin contamination in Danang, which is scheduled to be completed later this year, and we have committed to doing more. Our cooperation on these issues continues to build a foundation of trust to expand our relationship.

This is just the beginning. In addition to the many issues I have mentioned, Vietnam is an increasingly important partner on other regional and global challenges, including pandemic disease, wildlife and drug trafficking, and transnational crime. With a booming economy and a young and energetic population that holds overwhelmingly positive views of the United States, Vietnam has the potential to emerge as one of our strongest partners in the Asia-Pacific.

If confirmed, I will work with our exceptional U.S. Mission staff in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City to strengthen our partnership with Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. I will also make the safety and welfare of Mission personnel a top priority, including by ensuring they have appropriate facilities in Vietnam from which to do their important work. Our goal remains to advance American interests across the board and support the development of a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that contributes to international security, engages in mutually beneficial trade, and respects human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you again for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.