

Statement of Uzra Zeya
Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and
Human Rights
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Committee Members. It is the honor of my lifetime to be President Biden's nominee for Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. I am deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me.

I also want to thank those who made my journey here possible: my husband, Tom, for being here today and his decades of service to our nation as a U.S. Marine and civilian. I also want to thank our two children, Kira and Lexi, who could not be here today but whose idealism never ceases to inspire me.

Ours is a family rooted in public service and the advancement of freedom – from my father-in-law, a World War II veteran who battled tyranny at Okinawa; to my grandfather, a freedom fighter in India's quest for independence; to my mother, whose education was cut short by marriage at the age of 16, so she invested her brilliance in raising four independent-minded and opinionated daughters to seize opportunities never afforded her. I thank my parents, brother, and sisters for their solidarity in joining virtually today.

In today's disrupted world, the work of the State Department's "J family" of bureaus and offices to advance civilian security, democracy, and human rights has never been more important. Authoritarianism, violent anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia are on the rise worldwide, with a global democratic recession entering its fifteenth year. The Chinese government is perpetrating genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang while strangling autonomy in Hong Kong and continuing to suppress Tibetans, Christians, and other religious and ethnic minorities. Global human displacement is at the highest levels ever recorded and the scourge of human slavery is ever present, while terrorists expand their lethal reach from Africa to South Asia.

Recognizing the enormity and complexity of the task ahead, I'd like to emphasize three core areas where – if confirmed – I would partner with Members of this Committee to address:

First, the United States needs to take on the China challenge – what Secretary Blinken has called our greatest geostrategic test – from a position of strength, anchored in America’s support for human rights and democratic values. Having led U.S.-China human rights dialogues, I know the severe repression of human rights in China that has grown even more acute. I met with courageous Chinese human rights activists and their family members, gave voice to their concerns at the United Nations, and demanded the release of Chinese prisoners of conscience who put their quest for liberty above their personal welfare. I am proud to have been banned on Weibo – a state-controlled social media platform – for denouncing systematic Chinese human rights abuses in 2013. We also must continue to press China on synthetic opioids, which have killed too many Americans.

Second, we must defend and renew democracy at home and abroad, in tandem with allies, the “force multipliers” for our national security. We are stronger when we work together with democratic allies and partners to address not only China’s human rights abuses and Russia’s malign efforts to undermine Western democracies, but also rising corruption, disinformation, hate crimes, cyber threats, and violent extremist movements. If confirmed, I will leverage decades of experience, from Europe to South Asia, shoring up alliances and partnerships in service of shared, democratic values, and champion Biden-Harris Administration efforts to empower democratic partnerships, such as the Quad Summit and the planned Democracy Summit. I am strongly committed to using tools developed by Congress, such as the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, to target human rights violators, human traffickers, and kleptocrats – and to encourage parallel actions by allies and partners.

Third, we need more integrated, inclusive, and effective foreign policies and programs that deliver for the American people. If confirmed, I would build upon my experiences inside and outside government, most recently as CEO of a non-partisan global peacebuilders’ network. We must be careful stewards of taxpayer dollars while ensuring our policies and assistance have a measurable impact and help support reliable, rights-respecting, burden-sharing partners for the United States. In consultation with Congress, we must also exercise greater leadership to implement bipartisan legislation such as the Global Fragility Act, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, and the Women, Peace, and Security Act. And with the impact of COVID-19, we need to ensure that humanitarian assistance and diplomacy work in tandem towards promoting prevention, self-reliance, and durable solutions.

Finally, research shows diverse organizations produce more impactful and innovative results. If confirmed, I will champion a more diverse and inclusive State Department, especially with respect to the talented, 1,000-plus J family workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. If confirmed, I will work with Members of this Committee on policies that seek to deliver greater peace, security, and prosperity for the American people. I look forward to your questions.