

Statement of Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta
Nominee for Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 16, 2022

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee: It is an honor to be before you as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues at the Department of State.

My husband, Arvind and our daughter, Nayna are here with me today. I want to underscore how much their love and support mean to me, as well as that of all my family members, particularly my late parents, Sarah and Srini Rao.

I am grateful for the trust placed in me by the President and Secretary Blinken to serve the American people and advance the economic rights, leadership and safety of women and girls around the world. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with the Administration and Congress, in a bipartisan way, to lead the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues and the integration of gender equality across the work of the Department.

Research suggests countries are more prosperous, peaceful, and stable when women have economic security and are fully able to participate in their societies. Investing in women and advancing their human rights, as the Office of Global Women's Issues is mandated to do, is one of the most powerful ways to advance U.S. foreign policy interests and national security priorities.

I am proud to be a U.S. citizen and a first-generation immigrant. I belong to a family of professional women, each of whom dedicated their lives to serving their communities – and from a family of men who supported them fully.

Inspired by the values of my family, I was aware that the opportunities available to me and the roles exemplified by the women in my family were not the same as those available to the majority of women globally. This led me to focus my doctoral research in India on understanding the barriers that women face in pursuing a career, and ultimately, propelled me toward a career focused on rectifying the inequities experienced by women – that became both my passion and my profession. Over the past three decades, as the leader of a gender and development research institution, a senior executive of a multilateral organization, and as an adviser to philanthropies, I have learned that economic security and the guarantee of health and personal safety are critical ingredients for women to thrive and prosper – and when they do, so do their families, communities and nations. It is for this reason that I have

dedicated myself to advocating for evidence-based policies and programs to allow women and girls to fulfill their economic and leadership potential and conduct their lives with dignity, without fear of violence or discrimination.

Through that work, I witnessed the courage, resourcefulness and resilience of women in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, such as in the Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan or the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, or in Northern Nigeria. From the women entrepreneurs in Kenya and India who sustain small businesses despite limited access to financial services, to the brave women in Liberia who mobilized against great odds to demand peace for their families and communities, I have seen women use the limited resources they have to provide for their families and protect others.

The status of girls and women has improved since I began my career. However, the pace of change has been slow, and the gains are vulnerable to backsliding. COVID-19 has forced many women to leave their jobs, and countries across the globe report sharp increases in violence against women and girls. The pandemic, however, is not the only threat facing women and girls today. They are uniquely affected by the climate crisis, the weakening of democratic institutions, and the political instability and fragility that characterize more countries today than ever before.

Today, in real time, we are all witnessing the courage and resilience of Ukrainian women as they fight alongside men and seek safety for their children and families. Simultaneously, we watch in awe, the determination of Afghan women who despite the threat of imprisonment and torture, are protesting the increasingly stringent limits that are being placed on their rights by the Taliban. Those brave women need their voices amplified and championed.

Women's equality is a moral and economic imperative of U.S. foreign policy. It has transcended both Democratic and Republican administrations. Ever since the position of Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues was established in 2009 with bipartisan Congressional support, the issue has been a foreign policy priority. If confirmed, I will continue this bipartisan tradition and work closely with interagency, civil society, government and private sector partners, and especially with Congress, to advance the mandate of the Office to integrate gender equality throughout U.S. foreign policy.

I confess that I can almost hear my parents say: Enough with the talk – go get the job done! Should I be confirmed, I reaffirm to you: I am ready to get the job done.