

Testimony of Atul Keshap
Nomination Hearing for Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 23, 2015

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and to Maldives. I am grateful to President Obama for his trust and confidence in nominating me, and to Secretary Kerry and my State Department colleagues, particularly Assistant Secretary Nisha Biswal, for their support.

Permit me to begin by thanking my wife, Karen Young Keshap, also a Foreign Service Officer, for her love and support throughout the two decades we have served our country, and for raising our four wonderful children. I am honored to be here with my respected Mother, Zoë Antoinette Calvert, who served in the United States Foreign Service at our Embassies in India and the United Kingdom. I also pay tribute to my late father, Dr. Keshap Chander Sen, an immigrant to this country from India, who served the United Nations as a development economist.

Mr. Chairman, due to my father's UN service, my early years were spent at schools overseas, where the children of American diplomats were my earliest friends. My parents' service and my upbringing instilled in me a firm dedication and commitment to American values, and led me to a career in the Foreign Service.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my top priorities will be to ensure the security and safety of American citizens and to advance the interests and values of the United States and the American people.

In Sri Lanka, our primary interest is to help the people of that island succeed as a prosperous, unified, reconciled, peaceful, and democratic nation.

At the beginning of this year, the people of South Asia's oldest democracy courageously chose a new path of hope and renewal. Since January, Sri Lanka has made progress on challenging issues, from fighting corruption and media censorship, to beginning the long process of healing after decades of war.

We want to help the Sri Lankan people strengthen democracy, civil society, and human rights, including media freedom and freedom of religion. We want to help build a lasting peace and fellowship among Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious communities, including credible justice, accountability and reconciliation that can facilitate closure for those who suffered and lost loved ones during the war. It is important to get this right, and the UN and international community can lend useful insight to the efforts of the Sri Lankan people.

Economically, the U.S. is Sri Lanka's largest export market. While our trade volume is relatively low, there is great potential to expand our partnership.

In the security realm, our de-mining efforts have helped farmers return to once-war-ravaged land. There is also room for closer cooperation on disaster response and maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is a regional leader in the fight against cybercrime, a contributor to UN Peacekeeping Operations, and is focused on disrupting drug trafficking and fighting maritime piracy. As we look to advance our interests across the Indo-Pacific, Sri Lanka will be a critical partner.

I'll now turn to Maldives, where a young and dynamic populace is on the front lines of climate change. This island nation also faces challenges with youth unemployment, rising extremism, and social unrest. We are worried, however, about the current state of rule of law, due process, and human rights. All citizens should be allowed to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We must remain engaged, however, on several important mutual interests, including countering violent extremism, reducing the impact of climate change, and, as with Sri Lanka, ensuring security in the Indian Ocean. We want a better relationship with Maldives, so that we can deepen cooperation. And we want to help it return to the democratic path on which it courageously embarked a few years ago, and look forward to strengthening our relationship when that happens.

Mr. Chairman, the democratic progress, economic growth, and security of Sri Lanka and Maldives affect not just their own countries, but the broader Indo-Pacific region. If confirmed, I will consult closely with this Committee and others in Congress to advance U.S. values and interests.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.