

**Opening Statement for Jonathan Henick
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 27, 2022**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, I am deeply grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have entrusted in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you to strengthen bilateral relations with Uzbekistan.

I would like to thank my wife and partner - Dominique Freire - as well as my son and daughter, Oskar and Carmen. As you know, Foreign Service families make enormous sacrifices over the course of our careers. I simply could not have served our country without their steadfast support. I am also forever in debt to my parents, Bette and Steve, for their support and for sparking my interest in international affairs and public service. I regret that my father - a Marine Corps helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran before spending a career opening foreign markets to U.S. commercial products - did not live to see this day. I know that he would have been proud.

This nomination is the culmination of my lifelong interest in this region. At university, I majored in Soviet Area Studies with a focus on Central Asia. I spent a semester abroad and traveled to Uzbekistan before its independence. When I joined the Foreign Service, I jumped at the opportunity to do my very first overseas assignment at our newly established Embassy in Tashkent. I have also spent much of my career working in and with this region. I am beyond excited at the possibility to go back, if confirmed, in this new capacity.

Located at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is a country rich in history, with a young and growing population, and significant potential for a prosperous future. A strong U.S. relationship with Uzbekistan has implications that extend beyond our bilateral agenda to the other countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and the Indo-Pacific region. At the core of this relationship- now just over 30 years old - is the United States' steadfast support for Uzbekistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Uzbekistan has become an increasingly dynamic player in Central Asia since adopting a broad-based program of political, economic, and social reforms in 2016. We welcome these developments and have partnered with Uzbekistan to implement reforms that advance respect for human rights, foster democratic governance, and promote equitable economic growth.

As a career diplomat, I have seen firsthand the power of building relationships and engaging in public diplomacy, and how this can benefit individuals and civil society. If confirmed, I will work to continue and improve upon already significant initiatives to strengthen Uzbekistan's educational system and to facilitate exchange opportunities. These impressive efforts are a testament to the strengthening bilateral relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan.

I will work to expand and deepen our cooperation with the government of Uzbekistan to stay the course on reforms. I will encourage the development of accountable, democratic institutions; a flourishing civil society and independent media; the strengthening of rule of law; and the

protection of human rights for all, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, including women, religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ persons.

Uzbekistan has also made progress modernizing its economy, aiming to rebuild the international connections that placed the country at the center of historic trade routes. Uzbekistan's natural resources, as well as its manufacturing and agricultural capacity, are attracting growing interest from American companies, including those seeking alternatives to Xinjiang-sourced cotton. Uzbekistan has also become a regional leader on green economic initiatives with its ambitious plans for renewable energy and as one of only two Central Asian countries to sign the Global Methane Pledge. A prosperous, greener Uzbekistan that generates jobs for its people and diversifies its international trade is very much in the interest of the United States. As the government continues its preparations for accession to the World Trade Organization, I will underscore the importance of improving the investment climate and institutionalizing international labor standards.

I will also prioritize the expansion of the U.S. security partnership. Uzbekistan has long been an important partner in supporting Afghanistan's stability. If confirmed, I look forward to strengthening bilateral and regional security cooperation, including on law enforcement matters, border security, and counterterrorism.

Finally, I would endeavor to foster an inclusive work environment at Embassy Tashkent, consistent with the Administration's and this committee's vision of a State Department workforce that values collegiality, teamwork, and respect. The diversity of the American people is our greatest strength, and it is important that U.S. embassies model that diversity in places like Uzbekistan, where American values are not widely understood or worse, are actively misrepresented by malign actors.

If confirmed, I will seek to advance U.S. interests and enhance our strategic partnership with Uzbekistan by strengthening our bilateral security, people to people, and economic ties, and promoting the democratic values we share.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today. I welcome your questions.