

Statement of Donald Armin Blome
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 11, 2018

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Kaine, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored that President Trump nominated me to be the U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, and I appreciate the confidence he and Secretary Pompeo have shown in me by making this nomination.

My wife Debbie, and my sons, Nicholas and Carl, are here with me today. My daughter could not be here. Like most Foreign Service families, they have shared in the adventure and the great pride of representing our country overseas, but also the burdens of disrupted schooling and careers, evacuations, and long family separations. Few of us could do what we do without the support of our families, and I want to use this opportunity to thank them.

If confirmed, my highest priority as U.S. Ambassador will be ensuring the safety and security of our people and their families, and that of Americans living in and visiting Tunisia.

In 2011, the Tunisian people rejected dictatorship and reset their country's path toward democracy. Since that time, U.S.-Tunisia ties have strengthened and expanded. Tunisia has consolidated its democratic changes, partnered with the United States in the fight against terrorism, and taken steps to stabilize and open its economy. Over \$1.3 billion in U.S. investments since its revolution have reinforced this trajectory.

If confirmed, I look forward to building on the strong foundations of the U.S.-Tunisia partnership to advance U.S. security and prosperity. This will require sustaining our security cooperation to counter terrorist threats, secure borders, and respond to instability in neighboring Libya. Additionally, this will require working with our Tunisian partners to press forward economic reforms for sustainable and inclusive growth, thereby increasing trade and investment opportunities for U.S. and Tunisian businesses. It will also require encouraging Tunisia's leaders to

follow through on their democratic experiment, building the institutions needed for long-term success and stability.

Let me describe the three pillars of the U.S.-Tunisia relationship: security partnership, economic cooperation, and political support.

A major non-NATO ally and member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Tunisia knows the real threat of terrorism. The United States has worked with the Tunisian military and police to empower a security sector capable of securing Tunisia's territory and population while respecting the rule of law and individual rights. Tunisia also faces the challenge of holding accountable its nationals who traveled to Iraq, Syria, and Libya to engage in terrorist acts. With U.S. support, the Tunisian government is enhancing its capabilities to investigate, prosecute, and incarcerate these individuals. If confirmed, I would work to expand this security and counterterrorism relationship, helping our Tunisian partners to stand as a force for stability.

Tunisia's leaders have outlined a vision for inclusive and open economic growth, stronger anti-corruption measures, and a level playing field where U.S. and Tunisian companies can compete on the strength of their products and ideas. Tunisia's economic situation remains fragile as frustration with unemployment, the rising cost of living, and geographic disparities complicate the government's reform efforts. In partnership with the IMF, the Tunisian government has begun undertaking changes to rationalize government spending, encourage private sector development, and ensure young Tunisians are able to participate in their country's success. If confirmed, I would prioritize advocacy for U.S. companies seeking to export or pursue investment opportunities in Tunisia.

Finally, while Tunisia remains firmly pointed toward democracy, difficult steps remain to consolidate its political transformation. In 2014, Tunisia held its first free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections and finalized a new constitution, and Tunisians recently voted in their first-ever municipal elections. Despite this progress, the hard work continues: finalizing the constitutional court, tackling corruption, and ensuring that steps to improve accountability in the private sector do not impinge on civil society and non-

governmental activities. Elections slated for next year will be watched as a signal of the Tunisian democracy's maturity and robustness.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kaine, and Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to address you. If confirmed, I look forward leading the dynamic and talented team of U.S. professionals at U.S. Embassy Tunis as we work to advance U.S. priorities there.

I would be happy to answer any questions.