

**Opening Statement for the Hon. Donald Blome
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
December 14, 2021**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Honorable Members of this Committee; thank you for considering my nomination to serve as Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. I am grateful to this committee for previously confirming me as Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia.

I would like to start by thanking my family, my wife Debra who is here with me today and my three children, Sarah, Nicholas, and Carl, who could not be here. Over more than 28 years in the Foreign Service they have served with me, enduring frequent moves, emergency evacuations, and long periods of separation. They have also shared with me the honor of serving our country abroad, an honor for which I have always been deeply grateful.

The United States' relationship with Pakistan remains extraordinarily consequential for our core interests. Pakistan is pursuing expanded economic linkages with the United States as part of what it calls "geo-economics." We have a shared interest in promoting the role of U.S. business and commercial interests in Pakistan's economy. If confirmed, I will work with Pakistan to resolve market access issues, including concerns with Pakistan's digital economy regulations, intellectual property protections, and contract enforcement. I will encourage Pakistan to promote more transparent investments through sustainable financing, with a focus on the environmental and social impacts of investment projects.

Events in Afghanistan weigh heavily on me, having previously served there as Embassy Kabul's top political officer in 2012 and 2013. I worked alongside colleagues in and out of uniform, some of whom gave their lives in service of our country, some of whom were gravely injured, and many who still bear the invisible wounds of war. I also engaged with courageous Afghans who put themselves at great risk to build the Afghan state's institutions and stability. If confirmed, I will prioritize the safe relocation from Afghanistan of any U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, special immigrant visa applicants, and other Afghans to whom we have a special responsibility, along with their family members. Mission Pakistan also plays an important role on encouraging an inclusive Afghan government that respects and promotes the human rights of all individuals, including women and girls and members of minority groups, and ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a safehaven for international terrorism.

On the critical issue of counterterrorism, if confirmed, I will press Pakistan to target all terrorist groups without distinction. The United States and Pakistan are committed to combatting Al-Qa'ida, ISIS-Khorasan, and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. If confirmed, I also will engage Pakistan on fighting all other groups – including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The region can ill afford another conflict, especially between nuclear-armed states. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues to decrease tensions between India and Pakistan. I have been encouraged by the continued ceasefire along the Line of Control. Strong U.S. bilateral partnerships with India and Pakistan are not mutually exclusive; we need productive ties with both states. Pakistan and India should decide the pace, scope, and character of their bilateral interactions.

Pakistan is a partner in the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. In May of 2020, Pakistan donated 100,000 facemasks and 25,000 protective suits to the United States to safeguard our healthcare workers in the early stages of the pandemic. The United States has in turn donated to Pakistan 27.6 million doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, as well as 200 ventilators, and 1,200 pulse oximeters. On climate, Pakistan has signed onto the Global Methane Pledge, announced a moratorium on approving new coal-fired power generation, committed to having renewables provide 60 percent of electricity generation by 2030, and is implementing a 10 billion tree planting campaign.

If confirmed as Ambassador, I will never shy away from defending human rights in Pakistan, particularly freedom of religion and expression. Religious minorities in Pakistan have long faced societal and legal discrimination, as well as accusations of blasphemy. These accusations have undermined the rule of law, threatened mob rule, deeply damaged Pakistan's international reputation, and led to murderous violence and many deaths. If confirmed, I will speak out against these abuses and violations of human rights and religious freedom. I will urge the Pakistani government to cease harassment of journalists and members of civil society, who have faced kidnappings, assaults, intimidation, and disappearances, and hold perpetrators of these actions accountable. I will advocate for expanded protections for freedom of association and assembly and will meet with civil society partners regularly.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to close by saying that we have an important opportunity to renew and strengthen the bilateral relationship with Pakistan, and I want to work with this Committee and Congress to do so. Thank you for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.