

**Statement of Ambassador Michele Sison
Nominee to be Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, June 6, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and U.S. Ambassador to Maldives. I am deeply grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for their confidence in my abilities. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and interested Members of Congress to represent the American people and to advance U.S. goals in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

My thirty years in the U.S. Foreign Service includes postings as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon. I also have considerable experience in South Asia, having served in India and Pakistan and as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the region.

The United States has important interests in both Sri Lanka and Maldives. Sri Lanka is located along the busiest shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean, a region emerging as a strategic arena in which America's enduring interests are increasingly at play. Sri Lanka has also been a contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. The United States recognizes the importance of maintaining a broad range of partnerships with Sri Lanka as we encourage a lasting, democratic peace in the country after nearly three decades of devastating conflict.

The United States and other international partners have encouraged the Government of Sri Lanka to pursue the steps needed to foster genuine reconciliation and accountability. Although the Government of Sri Lanka defeated the terrorist organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, serious allegations of violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by both sides at the end of the war remain to be investigated and have slowed reconciliation.

In March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a U.S.-sponsored resolution calling on the Government of Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of Sri Lanka's own government-appointed Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. In April, the State Department issued its third report to Congress on accountability in Sri Lanka since the end of Sri Lanka's conflict in 2009. Achieving genuine reconciliation will require Sri Lanka to take credible steps to ensure equality and justice for all Sri Lankans, particularly for those living in former conflict areas. Such steps include demilitarization of the former conflict zones, establishment of a mechanism to address cases of the missing and detained, and setting a date for provincial elections in the north. Also critical will be the achievement of an agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the elected representatives of the Tamil community on devolution of power to provincial institutions.

During a May 18 meeting with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Secretary Clinton underscored that an enduring peace is unsustainable without adequate measures to address reconciliation and accountability. She encouraged a transparent and public process with regard to reconciliation and accountability to strengthen confidence inside and outside of Sri Lanka and to speed the healing of the country. If confirmed, I stand ready to lead our efforts to support Sri Lanka as it moves forward and to use U.S. assistance strategically to promote reconciliation, strengthen democratic institutions and practices, and foster economic growth, particularly in the north and east.

The U.S. Ambassador in Colombo is also accredited to the Republic of Maldives. In February, following a series of controversial events and protests, the former Vice President took office after the resignation of the President. The United States continues to encourage Maldives to work within existing democratic institutions to resolve political challenges peacefully and transparently. The U.S. Government now has a window of opportunity to step up its engagement in Maldives, and USAID recently committed funding to assist Maldives in ensuring that the next round of presidential elections is free and fair.

The United States also recognizes the importance of promoting security in the Indian Ocean. To that end, the U.S. Coast Guard has provided training to the Maldivian Coast Guard to improve its ability to respond to threats of piracy as well

as to combat transshipment of illicit commodities. U.S. assistance to the Maldives also promotes the development of a robust “climate resilient islands” model.

If confirmed, I plan to consult with Sri Lankans and Maldivians from all walks of life on how the United States can best support local initiatives to promote civil society, protect freedom of expression, and encourage youth exchanges. It would also be my goal if confirmed to engage in vigorous commercial advocacy in Sri Lanka and Maldives on behalf of U.S. companies, in support of President Obama’s National Export Initiative.

I would welcome your insights and views, as well as any questions you might have for me today. Thank you.