

Statement of Ted Osius
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 17, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador to Vietnam.

I am very pleased that members of my family and dear friends are able to join us today. I am grateful to the Senator from Maryland for chairing this hearing, and grateful to all of you for considering my nomination.

This is a dream come true for me. Early in my career I had the privilege of supporting Pete Peterson, the first U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam following normalization, as he laid the foundation for a new relationship between our two nations. I represented Vice President Al Gore on the team that prepared a bilateral trade agreement with Vietnam, and I accompanied President Bill Clinton on his historic visit there.

I have served in Asia for most of my 25 years in the Foreign Service. A highlight was helping lead the small team that opened our post in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. I relished the chance to make friends for America in a land that once only reminded Americans of conflict.

I traveled all over Vietnam, once riding a bicycle 1200 miles from Hanoi to Saigon. In the former demilitarized zone, I stood on a bridge, gazing at what appeared to be ponds dotting the landscape. An older woman said in Vietnamese that those were not ponds, but places where bombs had been dropped, including on her village. When I told her that I represented the government and people of the United States, she replied using the familial terms that make Vietnamese such an intimate language: "Hom nay, chung ta la anh chi em." You and I are now brother and sister.

From those beginnings, I witnessed our relationship with Vietnam grow into an important partnership, founded on mutual respect and shared strategic interests.

As Secretary Kerry said last year in Hanoi, "a strong, prosperous and independent Vietnam that respects the rule of law and human rights will be a critical partner for the United States on many regional and global challenges." While in the Senate, John Kerry joined with Senator John McCain to ensure that Americans

could see Vietnam not just as a war, but as a nation and a people the United States could work with peacefully. They looked beyond the bomb craters and saw hope for the future.

Their work included ensuring the fullest possible accounting of servicemen we lost in Vietnam, and we must complete that process honorably. Our history with Vietnam is a tough one, and even today we face real differences. If confirmed, I will face those differences squarely and directly with the leaders in Hanoi. I will say that when Vietnam's government respects human rights it will grow stronger, not weaker, and our partnership's potential will grow as well. I will press the government to protect universal human rights, including by releasing prisoners of conscience and by making systemic changes, so that Vietnam can fully integrate with the world community. Because even as in families, among brothers and sisters, differences can be worked out, and history can be overcome.

If confirmed, I will strive to strengthen the ties that bind our peoples. Those linkages between people are central to the Comprehensive Partnership launched by President Obama and President Sang last year. Educational exchange is a good example; already 16,000 Vietnamese study in the United States, and others attend the Fulbright Economics Training Program in Ho Chi Minh City.

Trade is another key element of the relationship. Two-way trade continues to grow -- from \$451 million in 1995 to nearly \$30 billion last year. The successful conclusion of the high-standard Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement will further deepen this trade and strategic relationship, bringing Vietnam into a community of nations that contributes 40% of world GDP.

Under the Comprehensive Partnership, our two nations are working to support peace, stability, cooperation, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific. We have expanded our work with Vietnam in areas such as security, nonproliferation, and law enforcement. If confirmed, I intend to continue the efforts of my predecessors to broaden and deepen our engagement. I will also maintain a firm commitment to the safety and security of all staff working for our Mission.

Half of the world's ship-based cargo passes through the South China Sea. The United States has a national interest in the unfettered flow of commerce and in freedom of navigation and overflight in these waters.

We have a deep stake in ensuring that the territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea are solved without coercion, force, or intimidation and in

accordance with international law. Unfortunately, we have seen lately a pattern of unilateral steps by China to advance its territorial and maritime claims, the latest of which is China's introduction of an oil rig into disputed waters near Vietnam.

The United States Congress plays a vital role in turning our difficult past with Vietnam into a promising future. If confirmed, I look forward to hosting many of you in Hanoi. Thank you, once again, for considering my nomination for this challenging and rewarding opportunity to continue to serve the United States of America.