

Statement for the Record
Phyllis M. Powers
Ambassador-Designate to Nicaragua
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
February 7, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua. I am grateful for the trust and confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have shown in nominating me for this critical post.

I would like to recognize my family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me throughout my career. I firmly believe that no one gets here alone and am confident I would not be here if they were not beside me.

The skills and experience acquired in my career in the Foreign Service have prepared me to serve in this distinguished position. If confirmed, I will embark on my sixth tour in the region. The seven years I spent in the U.S. Embassy in Colombia, as well as my time as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Lima, Peru, and as the Director of the Office of Provincial Affairs in Iraq taught me the importance of developing a partnership with host governments and civil society to achieve our goals.

I feel strongly that a culture of lawfulness is key to any strong democratic society. As the current U.S. Ambassador to Panama, I have seen firsthand that building and sustaining democratic institutions is the responsibility of all citizens. Our most successful programs have clearly been those with community involvement such as our programs in the area of prevention with youth at risk to ensure the future leaders of Panama have the opportunities they deserve. Our programs in Chorrillo, a neighborhood in Panama City with many social and economic needs are an example of what can be accomplished through partnerships with the community. The active participation of parents, community leaders, private sector, and law enforcement provides Panama's young people with viable alternatives to gang membership and encouraging their progress as productive members of the community. I am proud of the role our programs have played in this effort.

While we're on the subject of community involvement and civil society, the State Department has been clear in stating its concerns that the recent Nicaraguan elections were not transparent and were marred by significant irregularities. There

is a serious concern about the erosion of democracy in Nicaragua. From the marshes of the Euphrates in Iraq to the interior jungles of Peru and Colombia I have witnessed that citizens want to participate in the electoral process and when given the chance, will exercise that right. If confirmed, I will speak clearly and with conviction about the importance of protecting fundamental freedoms and democratic institutions, and stress the importance of an empowered civil society, independent media, informed citizenry, and effective local government and political party participation.

Our relationship with Nicaragua is broad and complex. Bilateral trade between the United States and Nicaragua has grown by two-thirds in the five years since the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement went into effect and in fact more than 125 U.S. businesses are currently doing business in Nicaragua. If confirmed, I will be a staunch advocate for U.S. businesses in Nicaragua. I was pleased to note that a small U.S. company with operations in Nicaragua, Sahlman Seafoods, Incorporated, recently won the Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence for global corporate social responsibility for its dedication to community development and environmental sustainability. We should promote and encourage cooperation between the people of the United States and Nicaragua in support of both our mutual interests.

Protecting U.S. citizens is the first responsibility of any ambassador, and, if confirmed, I will ensure the U.S. Embassy in Managua continues to provide a high level of service and attention to our citizens. More than 14,000 American citizens live and work in Nicaragua. Our diplomatic representation in Nicaragua includes representatives from eight U.S. agencies, including a Peace Corps contingent of approximately 220 volunteers who work at sites throughout the country.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues to advance our nation's interests in Nicaragua. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.