

STATEMENT OF TODD ROBINSON
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO GUATEMALA
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
JULY 10, 2014

Mister Chairman, distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor to appear today before you as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Guatemala. I am humbled by the trust and confidence President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have shown in putting forward my nomination for this position. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues to advance the interests of the United States.

I joined the Foreign Service in 1986 and since then, I have briefed Capitol Hill staff a number of times. Needless to say, this time is a little different. This time, I have the opportunity to acknowledge the support of my mother, Willetta BaCote, and my brothers, Mark Robinson and Jeffrey BaCote. They have been enormously influential in my career, and without their support, and that of my friends and colleagues, I would not be before you today.

Mr. Chairman, it will truly be an honor to return to the Republic of Guatemala. As you know, I was Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy in Guatemala City from 2009 – 2011. In fact, much of my career in the Foreign

Service has ranged throughout the region in Colombia, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia. Before going to Guatemala, I was Consul General in Barcelona, and when I left Guatemala, I took up my current duties as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. I have gained a wealth of experience from my work in these places and, if confirmed, I pledge to use this experience to advance U.S. goals in Guatemala.

Guatemala is at a critical moment. While the nation has made significant progress since the signing of the peace accords in 1996 that ended a three-decade long internal conflict, significant challenges remain. Trafficking of humans, weapons, and drugs; high rates of violence; impunity and corruption; poor education and employment opportunities; and chronic malnutrition are all serious issues and all particularly damaging to Guatemala's youngest, most defenseless citizens. These challenges are complex and require sustained and continued U.S. cooperation and engagement and, if confirmed, I will work with this committee and our Guatemalan partners to promote respect for human rights and economic and social inclusion for all members of society.

The United States and Guatemala are already making some progress. Guatemala has made advances in the fight against trafficking in persons and is committing additional funding in a constrained budget environment to its anti-trafficking efforts. There has been strong cooperation on counternarcotics, judicial

strengthening, and maternal and child health issues. If confirmed, I pledge to work to support President Perez Molina's "Zero Hunger" campaign to see that child health efforts, in particular, become institutionalized. Earlier this year, a Guatemalan court convicted four labor traffickers, the first ever conviction for forced labor in the country's history. The Department of State is working closely with the Government of Guatemala toward resolution of the remaining 31 inter-country adoption cases, pending since 2007. And, Guatemala recently became a "compliant" country in the terms of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which means it has agreed to work with civil society and international community to ensure all mining projects are conducted transparently.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot talk about Guatemala today without acknowledging the urgent humanitarian situation at the U.S. southern border related to unaccompanied children. As nations that value human dignity, it is our duty to respond collectively. President Perez Molina has acknowledged the need for collective action, and we are working toward that end. While visiting DHS facilities in Arizona last week, Guatemalan First Lady Rosa Leal de Pérez, a leading voice on this issue, reemphasized the Government of Guatemala's commitment to addressing the factors driving migration, including of children, such as a lack of economic and education opportunities. The significant increase in unaccompanied children is, in large measure, a direct result of the challenges I

described earlier. We cannot resolve them overnight and neither we, nor Guatemala, can address them alone. If confirmed, I will work with Congress and the Guatemalan government to see that U.S. assistance is effectively targeted to address the underlying causes of migration. I will also continue efforts to correct misunderstandings about aspects of U.S. law and correct misperceptions that children are permitted to remain in the United States.

Guatemala is a nation with drive and determination to open its borders and compete on a global scale. It is a nation of diverse people who are working to consolidate democratic principles, and who are cognizant of their responsibilities to advance the cause of international peace and security. It is a nation of enormous pride and cultural patrimony and, if confirmed, it will be my high honor to represent the United States in Guatemala.

Mr. Chairman, after nearly three decades in the Foreign Service, I deeply appreciate the honor of appearing before the committee today. I understand the serious interests the United States has in the success of Guatemala, and of the region as a whole. If confirmed, I pledge to work with Congress, and this committee to ensure that as we meet the challenges ahead we do so reflecting the values and ideals of the United States.

Thank you very much, I look forward to any questions you may have.