

Testimony of Pamela L. Spratlen
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Uzbekistan
September 10, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It is a great honor to appear before you today as the United States Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Uzbekistan. I am deeply grateful for the confidence President Obama and Secretary Kerry have entrusted in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen bilateral relations with Uzbekistan and promote U.S. interests and values there. I look forward to working with Congress in pursuit of these goals.

My 25 years in the Foreign Service have prepared me for this position. I know and appreciate the region. As the U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic, I have had the opportunity to implement important U.S. security, human dimension, and development policies in a fragile democracy. As the Deputy Chief of Mission in Kazakhstan, I was able to help deepen our partnership with Kazakhstan, a key ally during the time the country hosted the 2010 Summit of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe. During my tenure as Director for Central Asian Affairs and then acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, I became well acquainted with U.S. policy priorities in Uzbekistan and played a role in the earliest days of the South and Central Asia bureau. With the experience I have gained to date, I feel well-prepared to tackle the challenges and seek opportunities for the United States in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan lies at the heart of Central Asia and is the most populous country in the region. Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has always maintained a strong commitment to Uzbekistan's sovereignty and stability. The United States also remains committed to encouraging Uzbekistan's development towards becoming a tolerant, prosperous, democratic society that cooperates effectively with its neighbors, adheres to its international obligations, and promotes peace and stability domestically, regionally and globally.

Uzbekistan is an important partner in our ongoing efforts to help neighboring Afghanistan reach its full potential. Uzbekistan continues to provide vital assistance to Afghanistan in the form of electricity that keeps the lights on in homes and businesses across Kabul. The only railroad connecting Afghanistan to the outside world runs through Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is also a key link in the Northern Distribution Network, or NDN, which helps keep U.S. and NATO troops well-supplied and helps U.S. and NATO forces remove cargo from Afghanistan now that the mission there is in transition. If confirmed, I will encourage the government of Uzbekistan to continue this important support.

Our security cooperation with Uzbekistan is in a time of transition, but will continue to focus on the common goal of preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists. Increased cooperation with Uzbekistan on a number of training programs would help prevent a resurgence of terrorism in the region, stem the flow of illegal narcotics, and prevent human trafficking and illicit smuggling. Our security cooperation also includes efforts to professionalize the conduct of security forces and reinforce the need for accountability in law-enforcement institutions. Uzbekistan is an increasingly important partner in these efforts, especially in light of its deliberate, reliable resistance to Russian pressure in the post-Soviet space. If confirmed, I will build on our existing partnership to continue this cooperation.

Uzbekistan's large population and energy and mineral resources make it a natural choice for U.S. companies seeking to invest in Central Asia. The United States has been working with Uzbekistan to improve its investment climate and foster a cooperative regional economic environment. If confirmed, I will encourage Uzbekistan to implement necessary changes to further attract U.S. investment, diversify its economy, and promote regional economic connectivity.

My most recent experience as Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic highlighted the importance of nurturing nascent democratic institutions, civil society groups, and a free and open media atmosphere. I also understand the profound importance of promoting respect for human rights, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I will strongly encourage the government of Uzbekistan to comply with all of its international legal obligations on human rights. I will also continue to

press the government on specific prisoner cases such those raised by Senator Menendez and others in recent letters to President Karimov. I will work closely with my government counterparts and a diverse array of civil society institutions to address concerns about forced and child labor, allegations of torture, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, restrictions on independent civil society, opposition, and media, and religious freedom.

I know from my past experiences on Central Asian affairs that progress on some of the issues I just described will not be easy. If confirmed, I am fully committed to working with members of Congress, the executive branch, and the people of Uzbekistan to make concrete progress on tough issues like human rights and economic reforms. I will employ constant, consistent engagement to stress the need for meaningful action in these areas.

I place the utmost importance on protecting American citizens and U.S. values overseas. If confirmed, I will focus my efforts on protecting U.S. citizens and their interests in Uzbekistan. The position of Ambassador is a position of public trust, and I take this responsibility very seriously.

Direct engagement with the people of Uzbekistan will also be a priority if I am confirmed. Public diplomacy efforts, outreach, and educational exchanges promote mutual understanding and foster deeper bilateral ties.

Finally, I place great personal emphasis on strong leadership. If confirmed, I will bring my experience, enthusiasm, and knowledge to lead the Mission to the best of my ability.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.