

Senate Testimony of Ambassador Harry K. Thomas,
Nominee, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines
Tuesday, February 2, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Philippines. I am thankful to the President and Secretary Clinton for their confidence and trust; and also to my State Department friends and colleagues who have offered their support.

Allow me to express my love and gratitude to my immediate family – my parents, who sacrificed so much for us; my sister, whom I admire greatly; my wife Ericka; my daughter Casey, who could not be here today; and my cousins and mentors Sharon Boyd and Ray Boyd.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and other Members of Congress to strengthen bipartisan support for U.S. interests in the Philippines. I will continue the outstanding work Ambassador Kristie Kenney and her dedicated team have performed on behalf of the American and Filipino peoples.

The United States has a long, deep, and close relationship with the Philippines, a treaty ally whose soldiers have fought alongside ours in World War II and subsequent conflicts. In addition to the enduring bonds forged during our shared history, our countries have a long-standing friendship based on shared interests, democratic values, and strong people-to-people ties, and we work together to promote peace and prosperity in the Philippines and beyond.

Our close economic and development cooperation is improving the prospects for sustainable growth and good governance while reducing poverty in the Philippines. This cooperation stands to enhance our security and prosperity as well. The United States and the Philippines are seeking new ways to increase bilateral trade and investment to expand opportunities and create jobs and income for Americans and Filipinos alike. If confirmed, I will advocate for U.S. business and press for continued government efforts to protect intellectual property rights, combat corruption, and undertake structural economic reforms. We will continue to work closely with the Philippine government in developing a Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact.

The United States and the Philippines contribute to regional security and cooperate closely in combating transnational crime and terrorism. Our joint training and exercises enable military interoperability, building Philippine military capacity to address these challenges and provide disaster rescue and relief. The Philippine Armed Forces are making significant progress in fighting violent extremists, having captured or killed numerous members of the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group in recent years. In so doing, they are assisted by U.S. Special Forces who support U.S. engagement with the local population through economic development projects, civil-military operations such as medical care and school construction, and our myriad public diplomacy efforts. At the same time, we are engaged with Philippine criminal justice sector institutions to help build civilian law enforcement and justice sector capacity to combat transnational criminal threats.

Despite significant progress, instability in the South creates opportunities for terrorists, extremists, and clan violence. We supported the resumption in December of formal talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and we hope that both sides will be able to reach a peace settlement. In the meantime, we are continuing efforts to assist displaced persons who fled their homes because of violence. We condemn in the strongest possible terms such acts as the tragic killing of civilians in Maguindanao Province last November, and have emphasized that the Philippine government must spare no effort in bringing its perpetrators to justice and preventing further violence.

Support for democracy and human rights remains a cornerstone of our policy in the Philippines. Some of the Philippines democratic foundations are modeled on our own. The Philippines is now one of the world's largest democracies, and will hold national elections in May. We respect the right of the Filipino people to choose their leaders and look forward to witnessing a free, fair, transparent and peaceful election. The Philippines has made strides in addressing human rights abuses, but we will continue to press for more progress in eliminating extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and human trafficking, and convicting and prosecuting those responsible for these abuses. Philippine judicial institutions are fragile and need our continued support to ensure that justice is consistently and effectively delivered. If confirmed, I will make these high priorities.

With some 4 million Filipino-Americans living in the United States, nearly 130,000 Americans residing in the Philippines, and numerous cultural exchange programs between our countries, our two peoples contribute to bilateral relations by enhancing mutual understanding. Strengthening civil society, including the role of Muslims and women, is of special interest to me. If confirmed, I will work

tirelessly to protect the interests of U.S. citizens, engage with Filipinos from all walks of life, and strive to reflect the best that the United States has to offer.

The Philippines is well-positioned to help lead efforts to meet regional and global challenges, and we stand ready to assist. The Philippines contributes to global peacekeeping missions, including in Haiti, and has offered monetary assistance and disaster-relief expertise to that earthquake-stricken country. The Philippines played a key role in developing the ASEAN Charter, and has been outspoken in calling for political reform and respect for human rights in Burma. A Philippine Ambassador will chair the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May. Last year, the Philippines successfully hosted the first-ever ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise, which brought many countries together and impressively showcased what we are capable of when we join together in common effort. I am committed to exploring new ways to expand our bilateral cooperation.

In closing, if confirmed, I will proudly serve as U.S. Ambassador and work hard to safeguard American citizens, promote freedom, foster economic opportunity, and stand up for human rights and the rule of law. I thank you again for the privilege of appearing today. I welcome your questions.