

Opening Statement of Dr. Dafna Hochman Rand
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
February 8, 2024

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination for the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, or DRL. I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their trust and to the entire State Department for their dedicated service to the American people.

I thank my family for their love and support: my husband, Doug Rand, as well as my children, Maya, Jonah, and Elijah Rand.

I stand on the shoulders of giants, and today I recall the legacy of my paternal grandfather, Aaron Hochman, who served for over 50 years as a civilian engineer at the Department of Defense, dedicating his life to solving national security challenges including the design of the Pentagon's first mega-computer. My maternal grandfather, Yehuda Rosenman, escaped persecution and near-certain death by booking a ticket on one of the last boats to leave Poland in August 1939. He could have spent his life burying the past but instead he retrained as a social worker and dedicated himself to Jewish communal leadership and the rights of those in need, including refugees left behind in Europe.

Twenty years ago, I was a junior Senate staffer in this building, inspired to pursue a career in U.S. foreign policy in order to advance American interests and values. In the ensuing decades, whether serving within the U.S. government or in non-profit organizations, I have strived to embody three core principles: (1) advancing American power, especially our unique ability to improve lives at home and abroad; (2) the universal pursuit of human dignity, something we all share and that is valued across cultures and geographies; and (3) a commitment to transformative, ethical leadership, leaving the institutions where I serve better than I found them, focusing on mission, impact, and integrity.

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, I plan to pursue a number of priorities. Allow me to speak to three of particular significance:

First, the United States response to the People's Republic of China (PRC) is of fundamental, urgent importance to those of us who care about the norms shaping the world that we leave for our children. The United States is not only competing with the PRC in the military and economic domains, although those are critical to U.S. national security and prosperity. There is also a contest over the fate of a rules-based global order. This contest is playing out in every region of the world, with the PRC attempting to present a vision for the international order that deemphasizes the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, including ethnic and religious minorities. The PRC is propagating dangerous, repressive technologies, encouraging elite capture and corruption, and engaging in transnational repression.

Second, in the wake of Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, mitigating the threat that Russia poses to European and global security must remain a top priority for the United States and our democratic allies. Russia is actively working to undermine Europe's democratic order; we must help our allies respond by shoring up their democratic institutions. Russia promotes its venal model of authoritarianism – where corruption enriches the coffers of elites, the people are denied basic freedoms, and domestic repression facilitates its aggression abroad. Russia delights in mobilizing the world's autocrats against democratic freedoms, and Russia's security proxies are degrading democratic possibilities in Africa and elsewhere.

Third, if confirmed I will prioritize working with this Committee and all of Congress to advance implementation of critical international human rights legislation. Key laws have been passed to end the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, protect religious freedom, uphold global labor standards, and hold human rights violators and corrupt officials accountable for grave abuses. In my view, the Assistant Secretary of State for DRL has an important responsibility to work with Congress on its international human-rights-related legislation. These laws reflect Americans' continuing solidarity with those beyond our shores who seek freedom and dignity.

There are many other countries where I am concerned about democratic backsliding, closing civic space, unjust labor standards, and human rights violations and abuses. In Africa and the Middle East, de-democratizing trends are pervasive, and armed conflict and human rights abuses are exacting a terrible toll on civilians. I note in particular my concern about Iran and the groups it supports -- both the threat they pose to U.S. interests and those of our allies and the scale and scope of repression Iran has wrought on its own people.

If confirmed, I commit to elevate and expand on DRL's work to protect human rights defenders, civic activists, and journalists while promoting the rule of law and advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms. Without the United States having afforded these rights to generations of my family, I would not have had the opportunity to take on this responsibility today. I look forward to your questions.