

**Statement by Yousif Ghafari  
Ambassador-designate to Slovenia  
before the  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
April 8, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today as President Bush and Secretary Rice's nominee to represent the United States in Slovenia. I am privileged that they have selected me to represent our country as ambassador to Slovenia, and honored that this Committee is willing to consider my nomination.

I believe that my presence here today is a testament to the power of American democracy. There is a reason the opportunities that are possible in this great country are referred to as the "American Dream." I can think of no other country in which the opportunities for education, economic success and personal accomplishments are so great. I have been extraordinarily fortunate; I came here as a young man with very little means and no family connections, yet I had the opportunity to receive a good education, establish successful businesses, marry, and raise a family. We are living the American Dream. And now, I have come to that point in my career where I hope to be granted the privilege of serving my country.

Our bilateral relationship with Slovenia is strong and vibrant, particularly now since Slovenia holds the EU Presidency for the first half of 2008. It is a relationship enriched by generations of Slovene-Americans and the enduring ties they maintain with their land of origin.

As the first of the former Yugoslav Republics to gain independence, Slovenia plays a key role in the Western Balkans. It has worked long and hard to stabilize the entire Southeast Europe region, was the first of the former Yugoslav states to gain membership in NATO and the EU, and actively contributes to regional security by deploying more than 350 troops to Kosovo. In its role as EU President, Slovenia played a remarkable role in coalescing European support for resolution of Kosovo status and recognized Kosovo soon after its declaration of independence.

The United States and Slovenia share the goal of EU expansion in the Balkans, believing that it will further regional stabilization and development.

As a strong, stable and economically prosperous member of the Union, Slovenia recognizes that it has both a responsibility and an interest in aiding Western Balkan nations to move towards greater European and transatlantic integration and has undertaken several initiatives to achieve this goal.

One of Slovenia's notable initiatives is the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF). Since its inception in 1998, the ITF has raised more than \$220 million in donations from various countries, the EU, the UN Development Program and more than 70 private companies. More than \$100 million of this total has come from the USG as part of a program mandated by Congress that matches nearly all donations made by other governments, individuals, and corporations. As of October 2006, the fund had cleared nearly 70 million square meters of mines and aided more than 900 mine victims, most of them coming from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both the Slovene Embassy in Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Ljubljana have been involved in fundraising efforts for ITF.

We have also worked side-by-side with Slovenia in the struggle against terrorism. Slovenia has contributed forces to the international missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and elsewhere, and recently deployed more than 11 percent of its armed forces abroad. It recently increased its troop contribution in Afghanistan and has contributed equipment and ammunition to the Afghani Armed Forces. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to promote continued strong bilateral cooperation in the fight against terror and to encourage the Slovene Government to increase its participation in NATO missions, particularly in Afghanistan, where it could offer an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team.

Slovenia's strong economy presents many opportunities for U.S. businesses. There are approximately 40 U.S. companies with investments and/or sales offices in Slovenia and it is estimated that U.S. investment totals more than \$490 million. We should continue to encourage the Slovenian Government to strengthen its market economy through privatization and increased foreign direct investment. If confirmed, I will work to increase opportunities for U.S. companies and further expand our trade and investment, resulting in benefits to both our peoples.

Finally, if confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to continue to foster and sustain our close relationship by personally reaching out to the Slovene government, people and media to explain the U.S. perspective, to

promote U.S. policy interests, to remind young people of America's constant support for peace, freedom and human rights in Southeastern Europe, and throughout the world. I will continue to support our Embassy's efforts to expand academic, scientific and cultural exchanges, all of which will serve to bring our peoples closer together.

Mr. Chairman, the people of America are diverse in origin, religion, and education, yet they are almost universally inclusive and generous. Our way of government, even in the harsh light of an imperfect reality, is fair and welcoming, and enables its citizens to live in safety and prosperity. I hope, as a personal mission, even in a small way, to serve as a testament to the inclusive and generous spirit of the American people and our way of life. I thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you.

Drafted: TYeager, Amb.-DesignateGhafari

Cleared:

EUR/FO:	RGilchrist	ok
EUR/NCE:	LLochman	ok
EUR/PGI:	TCunningham	ok
EUR/EX:	LGoff	ok
EUR/ACE:	JBoris	ok
H:	BBrown	ok
EUR/SCE:	RSilberstein	ok
EUR/RPM:	PShea	ok
Embassy Ljubljana:	MColeman	ok
S/P:	DPittman	ok
P:	SGuha	ok
D:	GDelgado	info