

Testimony of Azita Raji
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Kingdom of Sweden
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I would like to begin by recognizing my parents for their wisdom, strength and encouragement, which are fundamental to my being here today. I am grateful to my husband, Gary Syman, for his unwavering support, and to our five daughters and seven grandchildren, for the joy and inspiration they bring me.

I appear before you as a woman whose family endured the life-altering upheaval of the Iranian Revolution, and found new hope and new life in the United States of America. Throughout my life, while living, studying or working in countries as different as Iran, Switzerland, Japan, Italy, France and the United States, I arrived at the realization that I had been, in principle and sensibility, quintessentially American all along. And so, I have never taken for granted the freedom to speak my mind, the protection of the rule of law, and the opportunities to benefit from the similarities and differences that create the transformative mosaic that is America. Our country's de facto motto, E Pluribus Unum, speaks to our belief in unity within diversity, a belief that has made me effective in what I have chosen to do in business, in philanthropy, in the political arena, and even in my own family life. And it also speaks to a world that in its differing views has never been in greater need of commonality, kinship, and partnership.

Which is why it is an especially meaningful honor for me to find myself here, before this distinguished Committee, and to have the trust of President Obama and Secretary Kerry to represent and serve the United States of America, and to be asked to do so in Sweden, an important partner and close friend of the United States and a country where respect for the rule of law, individual freedoms, human dignity and gender equality are hallmarks of national identity and defining pillars of government policy.

If confirmed, I pledge to serve our country to the best of my ability and to work closely with you to deepen the friendship and expand the cooperation

between the United States and Sweden. I will focus on four priorities. First, security challenges. Sweden is an engaged and effective strategic partner of the United States and NATO in promoting global peace and security. Our close cooperation with Sweden in support of Ukraine, as it fights against Russian aggression and seeks to implement ambitious reforms, is vital and greatly appreciated. Elsewhere, whether in Afghanistan (where Sweden made significant contributions to the ISAF mission, and currently provides assistance to Resolute Support Mission and support to Afghan democracy), or Africa (where Sweden is one of the largest contributors to Power Africa and to the global fight against Ebola), or Syria, Iraq and Kosovo, or in fighting ISIL, global terrorism and corruption, Sweden is valued and respected as a reliable partner in advancing peace. If confirmed, I will seek to further strengthen our bilateral cooperation in addressing regional and global security challenges, and to support Sweden's partnership with NATO.

Second, economic prosperity. As a strong and long-standing economic and trading partner since 1783, Sweden is the 11th largest direct investor and one of the fastest growing and largest investors per capita in the United States. Our economic partnership supports over 190,000 American jobs across 50 states. If confirmed, I will continue our focus on promoting bilateral trade and investment opportunities, particularly in emerging industries, such as information technology, biotech, and clean energy.

Today our economic focus must not just be bilateral, but also multilateral. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is an important building block of the wider trade policy agenda between the EU and the United States and will be an important focus of our work in the coming months. Sweden is a strong supporter of T-TIP and a logical partner in this effort, having relied on free trade to become one of the world's most globalized, competitive and innovative modern industrial economies. If confirmed, I will encourage Sweden to highlight and leverage its economic success in creating prosperity through trade to promote our shared objective of a comprehensive T-TIP agreement.

Third, environmental challenges. The United States and Sweden have an active partnership on environmental and climate change issues, including our close cooperation in the increasingly important Arctic region. Sweden chaired the Arctic Council from 2011 to 2013, and its accomplishments included a historic marine oil pollution preparedness and response agreement. The United States assumed chairmanship of the Arctic Council in April 2015. If confirmed, I will prioritize our continued bilateral cooperation on environmental and climate change issues, stewardship of the Arctic region, and

scientific research. As a global leader in environmental sustainability and clean energy technologies, Sweden derives more than half of its energy from renewable sources, making it less dependent on energy imports than most EU countries. If confirmed, I will engage with our partners in Swedish government and private sector to explore innovative ways to leverage Sweden's energy leadership in the EU to advance our shared priorities in addressing climate change and European energy security.

Fourth, shared values. Our growing friendship with Sweden remains anchored in the genuine affinity between our peoples and our strong commitment to democratic values and institutions, a commitment expressed in our global partnership to protect and advance human rights and civil society. It is a friendship based on a shared heritage that dates back to 1638, when the first generation of Swedish immigrants arrived on the shores of what is now the state of Delaware. Today over 4 million Americans claim Swedish descent. They continue to enrich our culture and society and have been part of our economic success from the beginning, by building such successful companies as Walgreens, Greyhound, and Nordstrom. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to deepen this enduring friendship, by encouraging understanding of our similarities and respectful debating of our differences, and by taking a multi-stakeholder approach to building innovative partnerships outside the government between our peoples and institutions and leveraging technology and public-private partnerships to connect with new audiences.

Finally, if confirmed, I look forward to meeting the talented and dedicated professionals of our Embassy in Stockholm. I will support their continued success and be their biggest advocate, as we work side by side to advance our vision of a deeper friendship and stronger partnership between the United States and Sweden. The safety and security of our team, and that of all Americans in Sweden, will always remain my top priority. Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.