

**STATEMENT OF MAURA CONNELLY
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO LEBANON
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
July 20, 2010**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar, Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by President Obama's decision to nominate me as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon and I deeply appreciate the confidence President Obama and Secretary Clinton have demonstrated in me.

As a Foreign Service Officer for the past 25 years, I have spent the better part of my career working on the Middle East. Two assignments in Jerusalem, and one each in Amman and Damascus, have made me familiar with the Levant and its environs. My experiences lead me to believe that despite the numerous sources of conflict in the Middle East, many in the region yearn for a brighter future and the realization of a just, lasting, and comprehensive Middle East peace. If confirmed as Ambassador to Lebanon, I will support the Lebanese in their efforts to achieve this goal.

Under President Obama, the U.S. commitment to Lebanon remains strong. Years of history, some of it painful, bind us to a country that can and should play a vital role in the Middle East of the future. The United States knows that a sovereign, independent Lebanon and a comprehensive Middle East peace are two mutually-reinforcing objectives. Lebanon will not be able to overcome the complex problems of its modern history without peace; nor will that peace be truly comprehensive without the active participation of an independent and sovereign Lebanon. When President Obama declared peace to be in the U.S. national interest, he linked our interests ever more closely to those of Lebanon. Stability in Lebanon is, therefore, important to us. In my last position, as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, I had the privilege of sharing in the efforts of Senator George Mitchell and his team. If confirmed, I will continue to support in every possible way Senator Mitchell's efforts to bring all the parties to the negotiating table.

With the June 2009 parliamentary elections, the Lebanese people chose a leadership that seeks to strengthen the Lebanese state. Economic and political reform are crucial to strengthening Lebanon, to building the institutions of the state, and restoring the role of the central government in the lives of all Lebanese. The cleavages of the post-2005 period may be starting to blur in the eyes of many in Lebanon and in the region but the options for Lebanon remain stark nonetheless: should the future of Lebanon be in the hands of leaders who

recognize that regional peace is vital to the well-being of future generations of Lebanese, who want to put their energies into restoring the state institutions that can provide for and protect the Lebanese? Or, should Lebanon's future be in the hands of those who preach eternal resistance and who paint a picture of a future defined by violence, a vision that is both fuelled and funded by an outside power with its own negative agenda? U.S. assistance to Lebanon over the past five years has been unapologetically directed at transparently supporting the aspirations of those Lebanese leaders who want to build a strong Lebanon and to extend the authority of the state throughout the territory.

U.S. assistance is aimed at strengthening Lebanon's key institutions of national government over the long-term. Our assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) supports the ability of these institutions to reassert the authority of the central government throughout the country. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training funding (IMET) will help provide the continued training and equipment needed to confront non-state terrorist actors, so as to provide security throughout all of Lebanon's territory and to prevent the south, in particular, from being used as a base to launch attacks against Israel. In a country where society still breaks down along confessional lines, the LAF stands out as an institution that has earned the respect of all Lebanese. Our support for the LAF not only provides it with some modest improvements in equipment and training; it also demonstrates that the United States recognizes the importance of this institution as one that can bind together the Lebanese people.

Equally important is our ongoing assistance to the ISF, which fosters the development of strong, legitimate security institutions able to provide services throughout Lebanon. Since 2006, we have committed more than \$114 million to this program and trained over 4,000 officers, provided 560 police vehicles, and refurbished the police training academy. As the ISF's capabilities improve, it will be able to relieve the LAF of some of its policing functions, which, we hope, will allow the LAF to concentrate on the development of its own mission and performance. The United States is proud of our assistance to these institutions, which has been undertaken in careful coordination with the Lebanese themselves. As Ambassador, I hope to continue administering our assistance to these vital institutions of statehood, which, at their core, aim to provide a secure future for all Lebanese and are essential in building a path to a more stable Lebanon and a more stable region.

Our assistance also seeks to strengthen Lebanon's democratic institutions, making them more transparent and credible. The parliamentary elections held in June 2009 and the municipal elections in May 2010 were encouraging but

more needs to be done to overcome the scepticism of the Lebanese people about the democratic process. We are working with the government of Lebanon to urge adoption of an electoral reform law, and strengthen the independence of the judiciary and citizen access to justice – priorities that the Lebanese people themselves have identified and continue working to support, including through the efforts of a number of vibrant civil society organizations. While Lebanon boasts a robust civil discourse, we continue to work with its civil society organizations build their capacity to play an active role in reform. As President Obama outlined in his Cairo initiative, the U.S. is also maintaining its strong support for the educational sector, with scholarships to support educational opportunities for students throughout Lebanon and a new robust basic education program to address priorities identified by the Government of Lebanon for all public schools throughout the country. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing our engagement through these programs. At the same time, consistent with our focus on enhanced democratic institutions and the rule of law, the United States continues to support the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

We also have provided debt relief to Lebanon to help spark economic growth and development. Along with projects aimed at energizing small-, medium-, and micro-enterprises, U.S. assistance to local municipalities seeks to foster economic growth and reduce poverty. Because we work with the Lebanese government on all of these programs, through a transparent and open process, our efforts serve the ultimate objective of strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. If confirmed, I will continue to seek ways to link our assistance ever more effectively with the goal of a truly independent and sovereign Lebanon.

The United States also has provided and will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to a number of Lebanese communities affected by the 2007 conflict at Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon, including 30,000 refugees displaced by the conflict. This year, we contributed \$20 million to support the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared and provide assistance to the most vulnerable of the displaced by supplying food, health care, shelter, access to basic education, and improved water and sanitation services while the camp is being reconstructed. At the same time, through the support from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the United States is helping meet the humanitarian needs of the over 400,000 registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. From 1997 to 2000, I served as the regional refugee coordinator in Amman monitoring our assistance to UNRWA, a job which took me for the first time to Lebanon to view conditions there, and the important work that UNRWA does in Lebanon and its other fields of operation. The situation of the

Palestinian refugees in the region is one that will be resolved by a comprehensive peace. As Senator Mitchell noted earlier this year, taking into account Lebanon's unique concerns, the United States will not support the forced naturalization of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

While our stake in Lebanon's independence and sovereignty as an essential component of Middle East peace is important, the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon has no greater priority than the protection of U.S. citizens in an unpredictable environment. As we witnessed in 2006, events can develop very rapidly. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that our Embassy maintains its constant level of readiness to assist American citizens in need in Lebanon.

Mr. Chairman, please allow me to reiterate how deeply honored I am to have been nominated as the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon. As a personal note, I would like to add that the opportunity to appear before this committee today brings back fond memories for me when, as a Page in the House of Representatives, I walked the halls of Congress on my various errands, absorbing the dynamics of American democracy at work. My appointment as a Page gave me a good start in life and my subsequent job as an elevator operator in the Capitol helped pay my way through Georgetown University. Little did I realize then that I would someday appear before this committee seeking the Senate's confirmation as a U.S. Ambassador. I thank you for considering my nomination and would be pleased to answer your questions.