

**Statement of Thomas P. Kelly
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Djibouti
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 13, 2014**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary of State have shown by nominating me to this position, and for the support of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee and the Congress to advance U.S. interests in Djibouti.

First, Mr. Chairman, let me acknowledge several family members here today. I am joined by my wife, Elsa Amaya-Kelly; my daughter Chantal Kelly; my brother Joe Kelly; my mother-in-law Elsa Reyes de Amaya; my brother-in-law Juan Carlos Amaya; my uncle John Kelly; Aunt Mary Kelly; Uncle Chris Burns; Aunt Suzie Burns; Cousin Patrick Kelly; Cousin Michael Kelly; and Mike's wife Karen Kelly.

Mr. Chairman, please allow me to tell you about myself. During my 28-year career, I have worked on a variety of issues that are relevant to my proposed post. I served for the first two-thirds of my career as an Economics Officer, working on development, trade, and finance issues around the world. I have extensive experience managing large diplomatic missions, serving as Deputy Chief

of Mission in Vilnius, Lithuania, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, and as Principal Officer in São Paulo, Brazil. Over the last three years, I have had the privilege to lead the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs as Acting Assistant Secretary and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. The Political-Military Bureau works every day to reinforce the global partnership between the State and Defense Departments for the benefit of our nation.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading Embassy Djibouti in advancing the interests of the United States. The U.S.-Djibouti relationship is strong, and our two countries share a firm commitment to peace and security, countering terrorism and piracy in the region, and economic development.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, we share important interests and goals with Djibouti. The May 5 meeting between President Obama and Djiboutian President Guelleh [GEHL-ay] reflected our desire to broaden our bilateral partnership to work closely together to advance our shared vision for a secure, stable, and prosperous Horn of Africa. Djibouti has a strategic position at the Bab-el-Mandab Strait, which joins the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Approximately 60 percent of Djibouti's population is ethnic Somali, and the Government of Djibouti has undertaken considerable efforts to restore peace in neighboring Somalia, a nation whose instability threatens the stability of the region. Djibouti is a troop-contributing country to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the

al-Shabaab terrorist group has launched fatal attacks against Djiboutian forces in Somalia. If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I will continue to build our bilateral relationship and contribute to efforts with Djibouti and other partners to promote a stable and peaceful Somalia.

Djibouti hosts the only U.S. military forward operating site in sub-Saharan Africa. This is Camp Lemonnier, the headquarters for the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), where more than 4,000 U.S. military and contracted personnel are stationed. If confirmed, I will continue to expand coordination and cooperation between Embassy personnel and Camp Lemonnier and its tenant U.S. military commands, including the CJTF-HOA contingent. If confirmed, I will also ensure that CJTF-HOA programming in Djibouti fits within the framework of U.S. government priorities to advance our key interests.

On the economic front, Mr. Chairman, Djibouti's government has privatized the country's excellent deep-water port and airport, reducing corruption and increasing revenue flows. Making Djibouti an attractive place for investment is essential for its economic development. Djibouti remains very poor, ranked 165th out of 187 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index. Less than five percent of its land is arable. The small USAID mission in Djibouti currently focuses on health and education but we are expanding and deepening our focus areas following the President's May 5 meetings. Mr. Chairman, to help grow

Djibouti's economy, the United States has recently pledged to increase technical and financial assistance to the Djiboutian people and to further invest in Djibouti's development. Additionally, the United States responds to food insecurity through support for the Famine Early Warning Network office in Djibouti, as well as through U.S.-funded Food for Peace programs. If confirmed, I will see that these programs remain a priority.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I am also committed to working with Djibouti to strengthen democratic governance. Disputes over the 2013 legislative elections fueled months of protests, and the government arrested hundreds of opposition supporters. If confirmed, I will underscore the importance of democracy and governance reforms, including greater space for media, opposition, and civil society groups.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my highest priority will be the protection of Americans and U.S. interests, including Mission personnel, living and traveling in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, I believe my prior experience in the Foreign Service has prepared me to serve as Ambassador to Djibouti. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working closely with you and other members of the Committee, and would hope to welcome you during my tenure.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee,

thank you again for the honor to appear before the Committee today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.