

**Opening Statement of Jennifer Gavito
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Libya
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 13, 2024**

Senator Murphy, Senator Young, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the State of Libya. I'm grateful for the confidence he and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Members of this Committee to advance America's critical national security interests in Libya.

I fulfilled my dream of serving the U.S. overseas when I joined the Foreign Service almost 26 years ago. I have spent the majority of my career working in and on the Middle East, including in Beirut, Jerusalem, and Dubai. My husband Tony and our teenage sons, Dominic and Ali, have been an integral part of that journey and I am honored to have them with me today. We are deeply proud of our boys, who have weathered the near-constant uncertainty and upheaval with resiliency and a healthy dose of humor.

Libya is interwoven in the history and lore of the United States itself. As the wife of a former U.S. Marine, the famous line from the Marine Corps hymn "to the shores of Tripoli," is part of the vernacular of our family and others across the country. Regrettably, Libya has become synonymous with tragedy and its people have been denied the prosperity their resource-abundant country should afford them. From Gaddafi's state sponsorship of terrorism that culminated in the downing of Pan Am Flight 103, to the struggle to unseat the Islamic State from its stronghold in the Libyan city of Sirte, to the growing instability in the Sahel that threatens NATO's southern flank, history has time and again proven real U.S. interests are at stake in Libya. If confirmed I would prioritize addressing these critical national security priorities.

First, Libya is fertile ground for global powers seeking to extend their influence and reach. PRC-linked firms have made deep inroads into Libya's

information and communications technology sector. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. industry solutions and underscore the vulnerabilities Libya faces in relying on untrustworthy vendors for its national security and critical infrastructure.

Russia, meanwhile, has subsumed Kremlin-backed Wagner forces and seeks a more open and formal defense relationship with Libyan actors as a low-cost tool to destabilize NATO's southern flank. If confirmed, I would work with Libyans in the east and west to promote military integration that safeguards the country's borders and sovereignty. I would also seek, if confirmed, to preserve hard-won counterterrorism gains to deny any opportunity for extremists to threaten U.S. interests. The selection of Libya as a priority country under the Global Fragility Act is recognition that addressing Libya's instability requires a long-term strategic investment using all the diplomatic and development tools at our disposal.

Second, Libya is blessed with Africa's largest and the world's ninth largest proven oil reserves, as well as significant gas reserves. Libya's economic stability and global energy markets are vulnerable to domestic upheaval and external – particularly Russian – manipulation. If confirmed, I would leverage American innovation and influence to help secure Libya's contributions to stable energy markets by supporting transparent, accountable management of the revenues to ensure Libya's resources are a source of unity rather than division.

Finally, the political impasse that has endured since Libya's failure to hold elections in December 2021 has been deeply disappointing, particularly for the Libyan people who embraced elections by registering to vote in massive numbers when last given the chance. Libyans from all parts of the country seek American leadership and support for their aspirations for unified, effective governance that respects the rights of all its people and allows civil society to operate freely and safely. Significant obstacles to that remain, but, if confirmed, I would work with the UN and international partners to find a political compromise among Libyan stakeholders that sets Libya on a path to elections that unify the country.

In closing, for America to effectively lead, we must be present. While the Department has increased the pace and frequency of travel into Libya, our lack of a permanent diplomatic presence cedes space to our strategic rivals who are active on the ground. If confirmed, I commit to sustaining our critical travel while working closely with Congress to accelerate our resumption of embassy operations in Tripoli, in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our personnel and all Americans. This commitment is deeply personal. Chris Stevens was a friend. I had dinner with him the week before he, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty were murdered. We shared a love for the Libyan people and for the country's vast potential. It would be an honor, if confirmed, to carry this legacy forward.

Senators Murphy and Young, thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions.