

**Statement of Cynthia Kierscht  
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
June 13, 2023**

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Biden’s nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee, and with the Congress more broadly, to advance American interests in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to express my gratitude for the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues throughout my career. In particular, I would like to recognize my mother, Dr. Marcia Kierscht, who has been an excellent role model and who has visited me at every post, and my late grandmother, Cynthia Selland, who, as a North Dakota public school teacher for 45 years, taught geography and from whom, no doubt, I got much inspiration for this journey. I am also grateful for the love and support of my brother, Matthew, and his family.

It has been my honor and privilege for more than 32 years of public service to represent the American people, protect American citizens, and promote American interests overseas. If confirmed, I will proudly lead our interagency team in Djibouti to do the same, leveraging my experience in North Africa and the Sahel -- in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and most recently as U.S. ambassador to Mauritania.

Djibouti holds significant strategic importance for the United States. Its location at the mouth of the Red Sea, through which 12 percent of all global trade passes, makes it the trade and humanitarian gateway for the Horn of Africa. Djibouti has been a key partner in U.S. efforts to improve security and stability in the region, including hosting Camp Lemonnier, the U.S. military’s only enduring presence on the African continent. Our military presence in Djibouti is particularly critical to ensuring the safety of our missions in Africa, as recently illustrated by the successful evacuation of U.S. embassy staff from Sudan. Djibouti has been a strong partner to the United States in upholding the rules-based international order at the United Nations and in other multilateral fora. As host of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, Djibouti plays a leading role in the region.

Djibouti is also a key location for the United States to work with strategic partners in Africa and the western Indian Ocean to counter efforts by some other nations, such as the People’s Republic of China, to undermine the rules-based order. If confirmed, I will work hand-in-hand with the full spectrum of U.S. government partners to protect American national security interests in Djibouti.

Over the past several years, Djibouti has faced economic headwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequent disruption to global shipping, the conflict in northern Ethiopia and the resulting reduction in trade through Djibouti's ports, and the historic drought affecting millions in the region. The Djiboutian people have shown remarkable resilience in the face of multiple crises, and despite these challenges, the economy continues to show potential, driven by the Djiboutian government's strategy to diversify and engage private sector-led growth. Djibouti is already a key international telecommunications hub as a landing point for numerous undersea cables, hosts the best port infrastructure in the region, and has significant and untapped renewable energy potential. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. private sector and government colleagues to support Djibouti's sustainable development and provide U.S. alternatives to investment by our strategic competitors.

Protecting U.S. national security and advancing our interests in the region requires a secure, prosperous, and democratic Djibouti. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. agencies and like-minded allies to promote the ideals of good governance and political freedom in Djibouti, including in advance of its 2026 presidential elections. Djibouti is also a major transit point for migrants. If confirmed, I will work with Djiboutian officials to seek ways to assist and protect vulnerable migrants, especially to combat trafficking in persons.

The United States has enjoyed a strong relationship with the Republic of Djibouti for decades and I see potential for even stronger ties, as we work together towards a more secure, prosperous, and democratic future for all. If confirmed, I will work with the embassy country team to build on their efforts to partner with the Djiboutians to advance regional peace and security, support sustainable economic development, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote good governance, while ensuring critical access and influence for our broader regional security efforts.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I welcome your questions.