

**STATEMENT OF JOHN CHRISTOPHER STEVENS
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO LIBYA
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
March 20, 2012**

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the honor of appearing before you today. I wish to thank the President for nominating me to serve as Ambassador to Libya, and for the confidence that he and the Secretary have shown in me.

It has been a great privilege to be involved in U.S. policy toward Libya at different points over the past several years. I first served in Tripoli in 2007, in a country firmly in the hands of an oppressive dictator. Last March I led a small team to Benghazi as the Special Envoy to the incipient Transitional National Council. It was a time of great excitement as the Libyan people first experienced freedom. But it was also a time of significant trepidation for what might come next. Should I be confirmed, it will be an extraordinary honor to represent the United States during this historic period of transition in Libya.

Libyans face significant challenges as they make the transition from an oppressive dictatorship to a stable and prosperous democracy. Colonel Qadhafi deliberately weakened the country's institutions, banned even the most rudimentary of civil society organizations, and outlawed all electoral activity. During his rule, corruption was rewarded, initiative discouraged, and independent thought suppressed. To change such a system will take some time and much effort. Libya's new leaders must build democratic institutions from scratch, consolidate control over militias, ensure that all Libyans are represented and respected in the new government, and dispose of the country's oil-wealth fairly and transparently.

Despite these difficult challenges, there are already signs of progress. The interim government is paying salaries and providing basic goods and services to the Libyan people. It is re-constituting government ministries, preparing for elections in June, and ensuring that Libyans throughout the country are represented by the new government. Libya's oil production – which is important in stabilizing world oil prices – is expected to reach pre-conflict levels by the end of the year. Several polls have shown the interim leadership is still viewed favorably by the majority of the population.

It is clearly in the U.S. interest to see Libya become a stable and prosperous democracy. Such an outcome would enhance our security and economic well-being, through, for example, security cooperation in the region, steady oil and gas production, and opportunities for U.S. businesses as Libyans rebuild their country. It would also serve as a powerful example to others in the region who are struggling to achieve their own democratic aspirations.

There is tremendous goodwill for the United States in Libya now. Libyans recognize the key role the United States played in building international support for their uprising against Qadhafi. I saw this gratitude frequently over the months I served in Benghazi – from our engagements with the revolution’s leadership to our early work with civil society and new media organizations. If confirmed, I would hope to continue the excellent work of Ambassador Cretz and his team in assisting the Libyans with their transition, and forging strong ties between U.S. and Libyan officials, business communities, students, and others.

As you know, the Administration has proposed a modest package of technical assistance for Libya during the transition period. It is fair to ask why the United States should provide any assistance at all to Libya, given the country’s wealth. Libya’s new leaders have often stated that the country intends to fund its own operations and reconstruction, and they are in fact already doing so, tapping their petroleum revenue and other assets of the previous regime.

It is in the U.S. interest to fund a limited number of activities that address immediate security and transition challenges. These U.S.-funded programs are aimed at: preventing weapons proliferation; providing advice to the interim government on elections and other transitional governance issues of immediate concern; and promoting a vibrant civil society. A limited investment in the immediate transition needs of Libya now will pay dividends for a lasting U.S.-Libya partnership in the years to come, and will help ensure that Libya contributes to regional stability and security.

Should I be confirmed, it would be a great honor to lead our Embassy in Tripoli in setting the foundations for a mutually beneficial relationship with a newly-democratic Libya.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.