

Richard B. Norland
Ambassador-Designate to Georgia
Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 21, 2012

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Georgia. I am honored by the confidence placed in me by President Obama and Secretary Clinton. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests in Georgia. I am pleased to introduce my wife, Mary Hartnett.

Madam Chairman, we meet today on the eve of the 20th anniversary of U.S.-Georgia relations, which were established on March 24, 1992. As President Obama noted during President Saakashvili's visit to Washington earlier this year, Georgia has made extraordinary progress during this time in transforming itself from a fragile state to one that has succeeded in significantly reducing petty corruption, modernizing state institutions and services, and building a sovereign and democratic country. Georgia has also demonstrated itself to be a reliable partner on issues of importance to the United States and the international community, such as Afghanistan, non-proliferation, and trade. Much work remains to be done, however, and if confirmed, I will build on the tremendous efforts of my predecessor, Ambassador John Bass, and of this Committee and your colleagues in the Congress, to deepen our partnership with the government and people of Georgia in these and other areas.

Of paramount importance, I want to emphasize that the United States commitment to Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty remains steadfast. The U.S. will continue to take an active role in the Geneva discussions to address security and humanitarian concerns, and to pursue a peaceful resolution to the conflict. I experienced these challenges first-hand while serving in Georgia and working on conflict issues there in the early 1990s. The United States will continue efforts to persuade Russia to fulfill its 2008 ceasefire commitments, while also working on the essential task of improving broader Georgia-Russia relations.

Equally significant will be the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes in Georgia, especially in light of parliamentary elections this fall and presidential elections in 2013. The elections provide Georgia with an opportunity

to realize its first peaceful and fully democratic transfer of power. Free and fair elections will bring Georgia closer to Euro-Atlantic standards and integration. To get there, the Georgian Government will have to build on reforms made to date to foster greater political competition, labor rights, judicial independence and media access. I strongly believe that advancing our key interest in Georgia's long-term security and stability is directly linked to the government's furthering democratic reforms.

As President Obama indicated, the U.S. continues to support Georgia's NATO membership aspirations. The Chicago Summit is an important opportunity to highlight Georgia's progress toward meeting membership criteria as well as its significant partnership contributions. Georgia currently contributes some 850 troops to ISAF and plans to deploy another 750 troops this fall, which will make it the largest non-NATO contributor. As a former deputy chief of mission in Afghanistan I am keenly aware of the importance of our mission to help the Afghan people, and of the hostile environment in Helmand Province where brave Georgian troops operate without caveats. Georgian soldiers and their families have also made extraordinary sacrifices with 15 soldiers killed in action and more than one hundred wounded, many severely. The United States will continue to work with the Georgian Government to care for their wounded soldiers.

Sustaining robust bilateral security and defense cooperation with Georgia will also remain a high priority if I am confirmed. Our plans for security assistance and military engagement with Georgia are to support Georgia's defense reforms, to train and equip Georgian troops for participation in ISAF operations, and to advance Georgia's NATO interoperability. Both Presidents agreed in January to enhance these programs to advance Georgian military modernization, reform, and self defense capabilities.

Economic linkages to the wider world have long formed the lifeblood of the Caucasus region, and, if confirmed, I will also work to deepen economic and trade cooperation between the United States and Georgia. President Obama took our relations in this area to a new level in January when he announced the launch of a high-level dialogue to strengthen trade relations, including the possibility of a free trade agreement. Through this dialogue our two countries can pursue cooperation that will benefit both U.S. and Georgian citizens alike. With the support of Congress we can continue to help Georgia strengthen rule of law, provide commercial and judicial training, and improve investment protections through continued U.S. assistance. Finally, building on Georgia's successful first Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, I will also continue the work

being done to develop a second compact proposal that, if completed, will make significant investments in the Georgian people through education.

Madam Chairman, taken together, these efforts will help bring Georgia closer to achieving its Euro-Atlantic integration goals and, if confirmed, I pledge to do my very best to advance U.S. interests there. Thank you very much for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.