

Statement of Laura F. Dogu
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 15, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to Nicaragua.

I am grateful for the trust and confidence President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have shown by sending my name to the Senate for consideration. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to protect and support U.S. citizens in Nicaragua. I will also work to promote a Nicaragua with transparent democratic institutions and values and a commitment to human rights, that is more economically integrated with other Central American countries, and that collaborates effectively with us on a growing range of issues.

Growing up, I learned firsthand about the value of serving your country from my father, a career Navy officer who spent a lifetime protecting America with tours of duty across the United States, abroad, and at sea. I would also like to recognize my family, friends, and colleagues who have guided and supported me throughout my life and career.

In preparation for the opportunity to lead our embassy in Managua, I carefully reviewed White House, Department of State, and Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs guidance related to advancing America's interests in global security, inclusive economic growth, climate change, accountable governance and freedom for all. Two points made by President Obama and Secretary Kerry's stood out as particularly relevant to Nicaragua.

President Obama rightly maintained, no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other...however, the United States is committed to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election. But... all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere.

If confirmed, I will be a strong proponent for these universal values. Nicaragua, in which human rights, democracy, and a vibrant civil society flourish, represents the surest path to attracting direct foreign investment and tackling endemic poverty in the country. More importantly, the universal values reinforce the importance of the people of

Nicaragua choosing their own destiny as a people and nation. If confirmed, the Embassy will continue to regularly maintain contact with a wide range of Nicaraguan advocates on behalf of human, civil, and political rights. I will also seek opportunities to make the same case with leaders at the highest level.

Secretary Kerry said, "... we have to work together to eliminate extreme poverty through inclusive economic growth – because we know that no society can thrive when entire segments of the population are excluded from opportunity."

From 1991 to 2006, three successive Nicaraguan administrations focused on free market reform as the path to recovery after 12 years of economic free-fall during the period of revolution and civil war. These policies achieved macroeconomic stability, cutting inflation from 33,548 percent in 1988 to 6.43 percent in 2014. Nicaragua also benefited from significant debt reduction through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Since 1995, the economy has expanded at an average annual real growth rate of 4 percent. Even so, with a gross domestic product of \$11.8 billion and a per capita income of \$1,904 in 2014, Nicaragua remains the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Growth must almost double to significantly reduce the rate of poverty. Such growth is possible only with strong, more accountable public institutions.

If confirmed, I will work hard to promote trade links, transparency, and the rule of law. Trade and investment opportunities are mutually beneficial and open the door for greater engagement on other essential U.S. priorities such as the development of stronger democratic institutions.

Along these lines, the Strategy for U.S. Engagement in Central America promotes prosperity, governance, and security. Key to Central America's success is regional economic integration. Central America must integrate economically in order to compete globally. Our engagement with Nicaragua under this strategy will advance governance, regional integration, prosperity, and security.

The occasion of my nomination as Ambassador leads me to reflect on my Foreign Service career. In posts as far flung as El Salvador, Turkey, Egypt, and twice in Mexico, as well as in Washington DC, I have led dynamic teams, which have made real progress addressing rule of law, democracy, economic growth, transparency, and the protection of American citizens. Taken together, this extensive experience has prepared me to serve as Ambassador to Nicaragua if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, I thank you again for your consideration of my nomination and I welcome your questions.