

**Testimony of Kamala Shirin Lakhdhir
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, July 13, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for the trust they have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee. I would like to thank my State Department mentors and colleagues, some of whom are here today, who have supported, advised, and educated me during my soon-to-be twenty-five years in the Foreign Service. I am particularly pleased to appear before you today with two good friends and colleagues.

With your permission Mr. Chairman, I would also like to recognize my brother, who is here today, and my parents, Ann and Noor Lakhdhir, who are watching in Connecticut. My father was born in Bombay, India in 1925 and came to the United States to attend the University of California Berkeley through the miracle of a full scholarship. When he moved to New York a few years later, he met my mother, who was there studying for a master's degree in international relations. I'm proud that some of my mother's ancestors arrived in Massachusetts and Connecticut in the 1600s, and that my father became an American citizen a month after I was born. My parents' lives, interests, and strong belief in American values inspired me to enter the Foreign Service.

If I am confirmed, the President and the Senate will entrust me with the responsibility to lead an Embassy community of more than 120 Americans from eight U.S. government agencies, their families, and close to 200 locally employed staff. My foremost commitments will be to the security of the Embassy personnel and their families, and to the effective pursuit of U.S. national interests.

Malaysia has undergone an extraordinary transformation over the past six decades. Its society, economy, and regional and global influence have developed at an amazing pace. Its foreign policy has evolved from establishing pragmatic relations with neighbors to playing an active leadership role in ASEAN, a body it helped to establish.

At the same time, the governments of the United States and Malaysia have also deepened and broadened our bilateral cooperation, which President Obama and Prime Minister Najib elevated to a Comprehensive Partnership just over two years ago. The United States and Malaysia have long-standing trade and investment ties. U.S. companies pioneered the electrical and electronics industry in Malaysia in the 1970s and they remain the largest investors in Malaysia's top earning export sector. Bilateral trade continues to grow, exceeding \$46 billion in 2015. If Congress approves the Trans-Pacific Partnership, our economic ties to the region and with Malaysia are expected to further increase and diversify.

Malaysia and the United States have also greatly expanded defense and law enforcement cooperation in order to ensure the safety and security of the peoples of both our countries. Malaysia takes very seriously the growing influence of ISIL, as well as the ongoing threat to Malaysian and foreign citizens in Eastern Sabah by the Abu Sayyaf Group. Bilaterally with Malaysia and through ASEAN, we are working more closely than ever before to counter violent extremist narratives, to keep our borders and skies safe, and to crack down on transnational crime. If confirmed, I will also support Malaysia's ongoing efforts to reduce tensions in the South China Sea by building regional consensus and encouraging a peaceful resolution of disputes.

The United States remains deeply concerned about human rights, the rule of law, transparency, and governance in Malaysia. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of representative government, and we look to Malaysia's leaders to live up to the highest democratic standards. If confirmed, I will also be fully dedicated to pressing Malaysia to achieve its commitments to combat trafficking in persons. This includes taking concrete steps to root out forced labor and debt bondage, whether in the domestic, plantation, construction, or manufacturing sectors. This effort is fundamentally a government and law enforcement

responsibility, but the Malaysian people and civil society play a critical role. In the last year, Malaysia passed legislation and regulations that, if enforced, support a victim-focused protection regime. If confirmed, I am committed to pressing for the law's effective implementation.

Mr. Chairman, for the last six decades, the peoples of the United States and Malaysia have formed close bonds across a range of common concerns. If confirmed, my highest aim will be to sustain and expand these ties in civil society, business, education, public health, environmental protection, and rule of law, among many others. In particular, with over 50 percent of the population under the age of 25, I look forward to engaging Malaysian young people, to expand their understanding of the United States, highlight our shared values, and work on solutions to common challenges that we all face.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am pleased to answer your questions.