

**Statement of Richard Mills  
Ambassador-Designate to Armenia  
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
September 17, 2014**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished members of the committee.

Twenty-three years ago, I served as the Department of State's first desk officer for newly independent Armenia, so it is a particular honor for me to be before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. With me today is my wife Leigh, a retired Foreign Service Officer, who has been my partner throughout my two-decade, professional journey from desk officer to this hearing. It means a great deal to me that she was able to join me here today and, if I am confirmed, will be with me in Yerevan.

My parents blessed me with curiosity about the world and a conviction that a public service career dedicated to promoting understanding of the United States and our values would be a fulfilling one. My parents were my inspiration to join the U.S. Foreign Service. Even though they were not able to travel from Texas to be here today, they are both certainly here with me in spirit.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will build upon the achievements of my predecessors and continue the Obama Administration's commitment to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives for Armenia.

The goal of our Armenian policy is simple: a free and prosperous Armenia, at peace with its neighbors. Achieving this goal means helping Armenia strengthen its democracy and rule of law; liberalize its economy, expand trade, and attract diversified foreign investment; resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully through the Minsk Group Process; and to reconcile with its neighbor Turkey through a full, frank, and just acknowledgment of the painful elements of the past. If confirmed, these will be my priorities.

While we have been clear about our disappointment over some of Armenia's recent decisions, such as its vote in the UN General Assembly with Russia against upholding Ukraine's sovereignty that put Armenia at odds with the overwhelming majority of the international community, the U.S. Government's commitment to a strong bilateral relationship with Armenia remains unchanged. Armenia's decision, in September 2013, to join the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and to end its negotiations with the European Union on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, served to emphasize the need to achieve our goals of decreasing

Armenia's regional isolation and bolstering its economic and security independence. This would give Yerevan greater ability to build economic and security relationships with a range of partners, including not only Russia, but its immediate neighbors, the EU, and the United States as well. We have stressed since Armenia's decision that strengthened economic collaboration with the United States and Europe can complement Armenia's future membership in the Eurasian Economic Union

Important to reducing Armenia's isolation and bolstering its economy is timely progress toward reconciliation with neighboring Turkey. This year marks the fifth anniversary of Armenia and Turkey's signing of the Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and the Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations. We continue to emphasize the importance of proceeding with final approval of these Protocols, without pre-conditions or linkage to other issues, and have been clear that responsibility for moving forward lies with the Turkish Government. The Administration will continue to press at the highest levels for Turkish ratification of the Protocols. While the Protocols remain the Administration's preferred path to normalized relations, the process outlined in the Protocols has stalled. The pressing need for reconciliation between the two states

requires that both sides consider other confidence-building measures that they could take now pending progress on the Protocols.

Efforts toward Turkish-Armenian reconciliation are especially important at this time, as the United States and the world will stand in solidarity with the Armenian people next year to mark the centenary of one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's worst atrocities, when 1.5 million Armenians were massacred or marched to their deaths in the final days of the Ottoman Empire. In advance of this tragic anniversary, it is important that Turkey engage with Armenia to achieve a full, frank, and just acknowledgement of the facts so that both nations can begin to forge a relationship that is peaceful, productive, and prosperous.

The protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be a source of concern to the U.S. Government, especially as the loss of life on both sides of the line of contact has tragically and sharply increased over the last few months. The Administration is committed to a peaceful settlement through the Minsk Group process. Secretary Kerry delivered this message when he met with the Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents at the NATO Summit in Wales on September 4th to discuss a way forward in peace negotiations. If confirmed, I will coordinate with Ambassador James Warlick,

the U.S. Co-Chair of the Minsk Group, on how Embassy Yerevan and I can assist the Administration's efforts to facilitate follow-up meetings in the months ahead.

As important as it is to assist Armenia to build relations with all of its neighbors and secure a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, our goal of a free and prosperous Armenia equally requires work inside Armenia as well. There are many fronts in this effort: enhanced progress on democratic and economic reforms; increased respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and strengthened rule of law and systemic reforms to combat corruption that address the real concerns of Armenian citizens and international investors. If confirmed, I will build on my predecessor's advocacy on these issues and work to implement targeted U.S. assistance programs that place a strong emphasis on the development of civil society, good governance, and judicial independence.

Our military cooperation with Armenia is strong and deepening. As a result of that military cooperation and U.S. support, Armenia is expanding its peacekeeping commitments with the UN in the Middle East, in addition to its long-standing efforts in support of the peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and with ISAF in Afghanistan.

In addition, I will continue our efforts to deepen economic ties, increase trade and investment, and advance market reforms, with the goal of increased bilateral trade and investment to the benefit of both countries. We have had success working with our Armenian partners in the U.S.-Armenia Task Force (USATF) to strengthen the business and investment environment in Armenia and are considering whether to begin negotiations with Yerevan on a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. There are opportunities for significant trade and investment in Armenia, especially in the country's information technology sector. But before Armenia can unleash the full potential of U.S. and foreign business interest, there must be progress on issues such as intellectual property rights protection, customs reform, and respect for contracts, so if confirmed these will be priorities as the Embassy works to strengthen the rule-of-law inside Armenia. There are also opportunities to leverage public-private partnerships, especially drawing on the resources and knowledge of the Armenian-American diaspora, to augment what is overall a decreasing foreign assistance budget for Armenia. If confirmed, I will continue my predecessor's focus on pursuing such partnerships.

Mr. Chairman, I want to close by assuring you that, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you, with members of this committee, and with the Congress as a whole in representing my fellow Americans as the United States

Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. And, in accordance with the Foreign Service's own values and traditions, I will, if confirmed, report candidly and objectively to Washington about developments in Armenia and provide recommendations for action that I believe are in the best interests of the United States.

My work twenty-two years ago introduced me to Armenia, its inspiring history, its capacity for political and cultural renewal, and its potential to be a catalyst for regional economic development. If confirmed, I look forward to enhancing my understanding of the country and the region by working with you, the Armenian Government, the Armenian people, and the Armenian-American community.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.