

Statement of Francisco Luis Palmieri
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Honduras
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 22, 2018

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to be nominated to represent the United States as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Honduras by President Trump. I thank Secretary of State Pompeo for his confidence in me.

I could not be here without the love and support of my family, beginning with my wife, Suzanne, and our children, Ellis and Madeline. As the son of a Colombian immigrant and grandson of Italian immigrants, I am acutely aware of the debt my family and I owe this great nation. If confirmed, I am committed to representing the President and the American people to advance our national interests in Honduras and the Western Hemisphere.

I am proud to have served the United States as a career member of the Foreign Service for more than 32 years. Throughout my career, I focused my service primarily on the Western Hemisphere, including a tour of duty in Honduras from 2001 through 2005. Our work at the State Department seeks to advance America's interests in this region by promoting a democratic, secure, stable, and prosperous hemisphere. I will work first and foremost to always advance American interests.

The United States has a long and close strategic partnership with Honduras. Honduras' economic prosperity, democracy, security, and development are inextricably linked to U.S. national security. Joint Task Force Bravo, located at Soto Cano Air Base inside Honduras, is an important element in our regional defense posture.

There is no denying the significant flow of migrants from Honduras and the two other Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador and Guatemala have created complex challenges. But, Honduras is addressing the underlying conditions driving migration, including the lack of jobs and economic opportunity, high levels of crime, and inefficient and sometimes corrupt government institutions. Hondurans must once again have hope for their future in Honduras.

With important help from the United States, the Honduran government's institutions and social services for receiving returned migrants have improved significantly under its Alliance for Prosperity plan. Honduras is strengthening its

border controls to prevent illicit trafficking and human smuggling. Honduras and the other Northern Triangle countries are working to help their people find safety and opportunity at home. Under its Alliance for Prosperity plan, Honduras is committing four dollars for every one dollar of U.S. assistance.

Honduras continues to face serious human rights challenges. If confirmed, I will work with the Honduran Government to address these problems. A national dialogue is vital to address the violence that occurred following the November 2017 election, to reform the electoral process, and most importantly to reconcile a deeply divided country. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to assist the Honduran National Police make reforms. I learned during my service in Iraq in 2010 how important an effective police force can be to a country. President Hernandez and the Honduran people all want to create a more professional and accountable police force that can earn their trust.

If confirmed, I will continue working with the Honduran Attorney General Oscar Chinchilla and the Public Ministry to expand its capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes, including human rights violations by security forces. I understand Honduras wants to do more to protect human rights defenders, labor activists, community leaders, and journalists, among many others.

Corruption continues to be one of Honduras' most significant challenges. The OAS Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, (MACCIH) has been instrumental in supporting the Attorney General's work to dismantle long-standing corruption networks in Honduras that threaten citizen security and undermine government institutions. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the OAS and the Honduran government to support MACCIH and the Attorney General's new anti-corruption unit and the anti-corruption courts.

Honduras is not the same country I lived and worked in 17 years ago. But I know from that time that Honduras is a valued and loyal partner to our nation. Hondurans always stand by our side. On 9/11 I remember exactly where I was in Tegucigalpa when our country was attacked. I also remember how the government and Hondurans of all political beliefs rallied to our side and our defense. Then National Assembly Whip, now President, Juan Orlando Hernandez led the effort to pass the resolution committing Honduran troops to the international coalition in Iraq and then Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez made sure our Embassy had enhanced police protection. Across all of Honduras, there is a deep abiding respect and affection for the United States, even among those who are our harshest critics.

The late great Honduran musician, Guillermo Anderson, wrote in his song “En Mi Pais,” “Para quererte el corazon mio no alcanza, Pero esta luz multiplica la esperanza.”¹ It is an ode to the natural beauty of Honduras, to the indomitable spirit of the Honduran people, and to the possibility of a brighter, better future for his country. With that inspiration, if confirmed, I will work to advance U.S.-Honduran relations and ensure that working together we create conditions so that every Honduran can have a better alternative than to make that dangerous journey north to our border.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to responding to your questions.

¹ Loosely translated: “In My Country,” “My heart is not filled with enough love for you; but this [country’s] light multiplies hope”