

Statement of Morse Tan
Nominee for Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 16, 2019

Senators, let me thank you, the President, the Secretary of State, and the friends and family who supported me, including those gathered here today.

The fact that I am before you today, Senators, is a tribute to the American Dream, which so many in this country have experienced. My parents underwent the hardships of the Korean War as children, and it was my father's dream from his youth to come to America, which he has viewed as the Promised Land. After passing a very competitive test, he brought his family to the United States with almost empty pockets but a heart full of the American Dream. Initially, we lived with those we fondly called Uncle Frank and Aunt Janet Ramirez in Campbell, California.

You may wonder how I have this unique first name Morse. Well, my practical parents figured that this energetic son of theirs was bound to get lost at some point. Furthermore, they came to realize that my Korean name had sound combinations that don't exist in the English language. So, they actually named me after the street we lived on, Morse Avenue, so that if I ever did get lost, my name would be the same as where I lived. Believe it or not, my sister somehow got Alice the same way, because we lived on Alice Avenue previously! It's a good thing we didn't live on Alameda de Las Pulgas or West 23rd Street! If we did, I'd probably tell you to just call me Al or Wes.

Here in this land of opportunity, my parents sacrificed to give my sister and me opportunities they never had. I am the first from both sides of my family to attend law school, much less to serve as a tenured, full professor of law. My sister has cared for many patients, including heads of state, as a physician.

I have devoted my professional life to pursue justice. Whether it is justice for people crushed in political prisoner camps in North Korea or those massacred in Latin America, I have written, taught and advocated for justice. From as far back as I can remember, I have been keenly wired for justice, which strongly motivates me.

The position of Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice, formerly known as the Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes, was established 22 years ago to lead the U.S. policy response to the atrocities in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Over the years, the work of the Ambassador and the Office of Global Criminal Justice (GCJ) has expanded to fight impunity throughout the world, such as in Cambodia, the Sudan, and Colombia. The office supports criminal accountability in international, hybrid, and national courts; it promotes efforts such as documentation and evidence collection to lay the groundwork for justice; and also promotes transitional justice policies to promote reconciliation as well as stability in seeking a durable peace under a just rule of law.

The GCJ Ambassador position is the first and only such position in any government worldwide and a testament to the goodness and greatness of the United States of America, of the commitment of our government and people to pursue justice for the victims of the worst atrocities, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes--and to help prevent such atrocities in the first place.

If confirmed, I would dedicate myself to the work of preventing, mitigating and seeking accountability for mass atrocities. No government in the world has more tools – whether diplomatic, intelligence, legal, military or economic – to do this work than the United States.

I am passionate that the cry of “Never Again” after the horrors of the Holocaust would find greater fulfillment. It was the United States that led the way with the unprecedented Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials, and it is the United States that is again leading the world through our promotion of global criminal justice over the last couple of decades.

If confirmed, I would be building upon this past work in areas crying out for justice today. I am honored to be supported by past Ambassadors who held this position as well as their Deputies. I have benefited from their counsel and would seek it while serving.

I would look to collaborate with Congress and other partners to work together for this worthwhile cause. If confirmed, the work would be much bigger than that of just one person.

My leadership style is one that seeks to delegate, play to the strengths of and credit those I work with. I am an affirming and encouraging person, who tries to find solutions and focus on positives, even in the context of crushing criminal abuses and violations. At the same time, I am a tenacious, persevering advocate for justice. I am deeply empathetic and conscientious, both tender hearted and tough minded. I believe these traits support success in this position, if confirmed.

I would seek to learn voraciously throughout my time of service. In certain respects, I have prepared to serve in this position for most of my life without necessarily even being aware of it.

Serving in this capacity would be the greatest professional honor of my life: it is beyond anything I had ever dreamed. To me though, it would be more of a mission than a position. If parents coming from the ruins and rubble of the Korean War can see their son in this Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice position, then I submit to you that the American Dream, as it has been for so many in our country, is alive and well! Thank you again for the honor of being here before you, Senators, and I would be pleased to respond to your questions.