

Testimony of Alaina Teplitz
Nominee for Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 28, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and, concurrently, to Maldives. I am very grateful to President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for their confidence in me.

I am very pleased that members of my family could join me today. Their support – and encouragement – have put me in this chair. My mother Marsha, and now her partner Ron, have visited me, no matter how remote the location, in every country I've served in the Foreign Service, except for Afghanistan. My husband, Robert, a former Marine, keeps me grounded; his love and loyalty buoy me during challenging times. I am also fortunate to have support from my extended family – my brother-in-law Frank and sister-in-law Sarah are able to join today.

Other family and friends, including my two college-aged sons, were unable to be present. My son Max is studying abroad in Kosovo this summer while his brother Miles is attending a summer course in physics and participating in Emergency Medical Technician training. My father, Jack, and stepmother, Marcella, remain at their home in Peoria, Illinois, where they are deeply involved in their community, reminding me of what is best about Americans and the democratic values we nurture.

As the present U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, I have relied on two previous tours in the region, in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, as well as a South and Central Asia Bureau assignment to provide a foundation of understanding about the culture, history, and unique geopolitics of South Asia. I will continue to build on this experience to carry out my duties as Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives, if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka and Maldives are important to the wider security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. Both nations are positioned astride key shipping lanes that connect the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, the free navigation of which is vital to U.S. economic and security interests. We must also be mindful of the economic and commercial opportunities each country affords, and the importance of working with them to maintain a rules-based international order.

Sri Lanka has come a long way since voters in 2015 rejected the corruption, strife, and repression of the past and threw their support behind a reform, reconciliation, and accountability agenda. However, the pace of progress on reform and justice has been slow, and, as anti-Muslim riots in March so painfully demonstrated, the work of mending inter-ethnic and inter-religious fissures remains incomplete. We continue to support Sri Lanka's efforts to make good on its commitments to its people to come to terms with its past, implement justice and accountability measures, and secure a peaceful, prosperous future. We also support growth of Sri Lanka's capacity to make greater contributions to regional stability while protecting its own sovereignty and national interests. Sri Lanka's success in this endeavor will make it a stronger partner to the United States and contribute to our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Chairman, Maldives is a nation of atolls that faces serious challenges, from the spread of extremism and environmental threats such as encroaching seas, coastal degradation, and natural disasters, to the curtailment of freedom of expression and other democratic rights under the current government. The February suspension of the constitution, imprisonment of supreme court justices and opposition politicians, and attacks on fundamental liberties prompted condemnation from across the international community and from the United States. We remain concerned about this situation and urge Maldives' leadership to abide by the rule of law and to allow democratic institutions to function.

In areas where our interests intersect, such as countering violent extremism, we continue to engage Maldives. Its return to the democratic path would make a wider array of cooperation possible.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work in both Sri Lanka and Maldives to advance U.S. values and a shared vision of good governance, transparent economic development, free navigation and commerce, fair and open investment environments, and a stable, rules-based regional order. I would like to express my appreciation to this committee and its members for your support of U.S. engagement in Sri Lanka and Maldives and to thank you for considering my nomination.