

Statement of Lisa Kenna
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Peru
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 23, 2020

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

It's an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Peru. I thank the President and Secretary Pompeo for placing their trust in me. If confirmed, I will work diligently with this committee and other members of Congress to advance American interests, strengthen cooperation with our friend Peru across all sectors, and further promote our shared values of democracy, prosperity, and greater security throughout the region.

I would like to thank my two daughters – Amelia and Isabel – for accepting my commitment to public service. I also thank my sister Julie, my mother-in-law Connie Kenna, and my incredible group of friends for the support they've given me, Amelia, and Isabel, particularly in the many years since the deaths of my husband Roger and my mother Marjorie who were so central to my life.

I am blessed to come from a family that believes in serving our country and other people. My mother was raised by her own single mother on a tiny farm in Indiana and dedicated her life to caring for nursing home residents as a volunteer social worker for 40 years. My father served for decades as a pilot in the Air Force. I myself began my government service in my final year of college and have served faithfully across both Republican and Democratic administrations ever since. The longer I've been in public service, the more I am convinced America is the world's most exceptional nation.

Over the past five years, as a senior staffer for three different secretaries of state, I've had the great privilege of working on virtually every issue of foreign policy consequence, including those concerning the Western Hemisphere, and Peru specifically. If confirmed, I will maintain the United States' vital relationship with the Republic of Peru, which has long been one of our closest partners in the region.

Recently, Mission Peru has performed heroically to sustain our strong partnership and serve our fellow Americans in these challenging times. As you know, when the Government of Peru closed its borders to stem the spread of COVID-19, thousands of American citizens requested assistance to return to the United States. The State Department, and my team in the Operations Center that staffed the Repatriation Task Force, worked closely with Peruvian authorities, airlines, and local partners to repatriate over 12,000 U.S. citizens and Legal Permanent Residents. We will not rest until the last American who wants to return from Peru has an opportunity to do so.

In terms of further fighting the virus, President Trump and President Vizcarra recently affirmed their intent to intensify cooperation, and the U.S. has also offered additional support to meet Peru's healthcare needs. As we move to reopen our economies, we hope to focus again on more traditional areas, including security, democratic governance, trade, and cultural and educational ties.

We must also expand our joint efforts to tackle the scourge of transnational organized crime that threatens both our countries, including by cutting off sources of illicit financing. American investments to dismantle the narcotics trade and reduce cultivation and production of coca and cocaine have paid some dividends. Although there is considerably more work to be done, Peru is committed to eradicating coca, with U.S. support, in the country's highest-yield regions.

Illegal mining, which is linked to narco-trafficking and transnational criminal networks, endangers public health, damages Peru's environment, and promotes human trafficking. To better fight the problem together, our governments signed an agreement in 2017 that will provide economic development alternatives and enhance Peru's capacity to prosecute cases connected with illegal mining.

The U.S. and Peru are also growing our shared support for a peaceful return to democracy in Venezuela. Maduro's man-made humanitarian crisis has driven millions of Venezuelans to flee their country. Peru – the founder of the Lima Group – has shown leadership in generously hosting nearly one million displaced Venezuelans and frequently calling out the former regime for its flagrant human rights abuses.

Trade, tourism, and educational exchanges have drawn our two countries closer together in recent years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual number of U.S. citizen visitors to Peru exceeded 580,000, and the United States remains a primary destination for Peruvian students seeking to study abroad.

So too are we growing closer on trade. 2019 marked the tenth anniversary of the U.S.-Peru Trade-Promotion Agreement, a cornerstone of our bilateral relationship that set high standards for both countries concerning market access and protections – for investments and the environment. If confirmed, I will continue to build important bonds – economic and otherwise – for the peoples of both countries.

I look forward to working with the committee to achieve these shared goals, and I am happy to answer any questions.