

Testimony of Julie Chung
Nominee for Ambassador to Sri Lanka
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 20, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagerty, members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka. I am grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me by nominating me for this assignment.

As a first generation immigrant from South Korea, I am proud that my parents instilled in me the values of hard work, optimism, love of country, a Christian faith, and the belief that America is a country of opportunity and force for good. I am thankful for the sacrifices they made for my sister and me, and their unconditional love. I am also thankful to my husband Jose Collazo whose unwavering support and patience have been a strong foundation for our family, including our eight year old son, Mateo, who still doesn't understand exactly what mom does at work but is proud of me anyways.

During my 25-year career in the Foreign Service, I have served in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, advocating for U.S. interests, building strategic partnerships, and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders to promote democratic values and private sector-led economic growth. My experience in China, Japan, and throughout Southeast Asia have provided me unique insight into the importance of American leadership to ensuring a free, open, resilient, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. As the Acting Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, I am proud to have led policies that supported democratic partners and strengthened their ability to counter authoritarian oppression, corruption, and terrorism. And I believe that as policy leaders, we also have a responsibility to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in our workforce, something I have actively promoted since joining the Foreign Service as part of the very first cohort of the Pickering Fellowship supported by Congress.

Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka is Asia's oldest democracy and survived the tragedy of a civil war that resulted in unimaginable violence and continued ethnic and religious divisions. If confirmed, I am committed to speaking clearly and consistently in support of democratic values, human rights, and a strong civil society that are essential to democracies and central to our foreign policy approach. We must also be strong partners in encouraging justice, accountability, and reconciliation so that all Sri Lankans can share in the benefits of peace, security, and prosperity.

Sri Lanka is positioned in a strategic location at the heart of the Indian Ocean, and its critical ports with access to global maritime lanes and trading routes play a pivotal role in a free and open Indo-Pacific architecture. This reinforces the necessity for the United States to build constructive relationships with Sri Lanka, including with civil society, the private sector, and the Sri Lankan people. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to advocate for quality infrastructure and investment based on transparency, respect for international law, and good governance, which is mindful of sustainable environmental and labor standards. We must also support U.S. companies doing business in Sri Lanka and utilize the tools we have with the Development Finance Corporation and the Export-Import Bank to provide alternatives to coercive lending and opaque contracts.

The sinking of the MV X-Press Pearl cargo ship near the shores of Colombo a few months ago, causing its biggest marine disaster in Sri Lanka's history, points to the need for upholding such standards. U.S. humanitarian assistance, emergency response capabilities, and environmental surveillance tools helped Sri Lanka respond to this tragedy and is emblematic of how we can be a positive force and strong partner to the people of Sri Lanka.

I believe our most important assets are American innovation, people-to-people exchanges, and education. If confirmed, I pledge to expanding and seeking creative ways to build upon these networks and connections. We must also continue to engage the many voices of the Sri Lankan diaspora in the United States who make valuable contributions in our bilateral relationship. Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka offers many challenges and opportunities for the United States to grow our relationship. I will make every effort to advance our values and shared interests so that Sri Lanka meets its full potential to be a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific.

Thank you again for allowing me to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.