

**Testimony of Geeta Pasi
Nominee to be Ambassador to Ethiopia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, December 2, 2020**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear as the nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work with this committee and the Congress to advance our country's interests in Ethiopia.

I would like to recognize my sisters, Usha and Rita, and my brother, Sunil Kumar, and their families and thank them for their love and support. I am a naturalized American who came here as a child of immigrants. Serving my country as ambassador is the highest honor. I would like to thank my family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who have helped me reach this point.

If confirmed as ambassador, I will promote and protect U.S. interests and values in Ethiopia. I would look forward to working closely with members of this Committee and your staffs in that endeavor.

Mr. Chairman, during more than thirty years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have had a variety of assignments, including in countries in transition. I have had the honor to serve as ambassador twice – to Djibouti and Chad. Overseas, I served

in Ghana when the country had its first democratic elections and in Romania shortly after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu. I was in Bangladesh when the caretaker government declared a state of emergency and helped steer the country to democratic elections. In Washington, I was the Afghanistan Desk Officer on September 11, 2001. I had covered the country for about six weeks when our country was attacked by the Afghan-based al Qaida network. I served as Office Director for East African Affairs with broad policy and program responsibility for East Africa, including the Horn of Africa. Throughout my career, helping develop the strength and effectiveness of the State Department has been a priority, including when I served in the Bureau of Human Resources and now as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs. If confirmed, I am committed to continuing to support the development of my institution and my colleagues, including by recruiting and promoting the careers of a corps of professionals and leaders that reflects the strength and diversity of our great nation.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading our embassy in Ethiopia in advancing the interests of the United States. Our team in Addis Ababa consists of Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel, military staff assigned to the Embassy, and the invaluable Foreign Service National employees. Our interests in Ethiopia are primarily in the areas of peace and security, democratic governance, and economic development, as well as the promotion of U.S. business.

The crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is grave, with risks to life, Ethiopian and regional stability, and our national interests. While the Government of Ethiopia announced on November 28 the end of military operations, the United States is still concerned about ongoing hostilities and the risks the conflict poses. During his call with Prime Minister Abiy on November 30, Secretary Pompeo called for a complete end to the fighting and constructive dialogue to resolve the conflict. Throughout this crisis we have cautioned against creating an ethnic conflict and have encouraged the Government of Ethiopia to engage with moderate Tigrayan leaders to restore peace. The United States, the African Union, and other international partners are ready to assist with dialogue and reconciliation. We also continue to urge protection of civilians and facilitation of free, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access. To date, more than 45,000 Ethiopian refugees have entered Sudan, stretching humanitarian operations there. We continue to work closely with our partners in the region to ensure the safety and protection of American citizens in the Tigray region.

This is a critical moment for Ethiopia. Popular desires for greater political freedom and civil liberties led to the selection of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister in 2018. Abiy made sweeping changes to Ethiopia, and made progress addressing longstanding democratic concerns, including human rights and press freedom. The complex issues that impede transition in Ethiopia include land tenure, ethnic

tensions, and youth unemployment. The current Tigray crisis poses a threat to Ethiopia's reform agenda and national unity.

Also at risk is Ethiopia's leadership in promoting peace and stability and countering violent extremism in the region, if an outflow of refugees from Ethiopia, a stalled political process, and violence continue unabated. Africa and the world need a stable, secure, and peaceful Ethiopia. Ethiopia's significant contributions to the African Union's counterterrorism and peace support mission in Somalia and to the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts in South Sudan, as well as Ethiopia's leading role in the South Sudanese peace process are at stake. Ethiopia also contributes to regional stability as the third-largest host of refugees in Africa. If confirmed, I will work hard for peace and stability in the Horn.

The United States maintains strong relations with Ethiopia and aims to strengthen our partnership. While the security of Ethiopia and the region is front and center in our bilateral relationship, we also seek to promote democracy and good governance. If confirmed, I will work with you to represent the interests and values of the American people to the government and people of Ethiopia at this critical juncture. I will also advocate for full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as for reforms that strengthen democratic institutions. Ethiopia's respect for these values we share will enhance our partnership.

U.S. national interests lie in supporting Ethiopia's economic progress as well, because a sound business and investment environment can drive the growth needed to underpin long-term stability. These factors also create opportunities for American businesses, and if confirmed, I will work to promote a business climate in Ethiopia that encourages U.S. private sector activity and ensures a level playing field for U.S. firms.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, if confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, my top priority will be the security, interests, and welfare of American citizens. Whether by ensuring responsive consular services, promoting American values, advocating for U.S. businesses, or strengthening partnerships against terrorism, this priority will drive the Embassy's agenda.

Ethiopia is a dynamic nation with an extraordinary history of independence and accomplishments as well as a future of enormous potential. I am honored by your consideration of me to serve in such an important posting and I will draw on the depth of my experience to navigate our engagement through the current challenges facing Ethiopia.

If confirmed, I will welcome input and advice from you and your staff on any aspect of the multifaceted relationship between the United States and Ethiopia. I will also be pleased, if confirmed, to receive you and your staff in Ethiopia and to keep you apprised of the activities of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the privilege of appearing before you today. If confirmed, I would welcome the challenge of protecting and advancing the interests of the United States in Ethiopia: It is a duty and responsibility I would be honored to accept. Thank you and I welcome any questions you might have.