

Statement of Laura Farnsworth Dogu
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Honduras
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
February 8, 2022

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Honduras. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance our nation's interests as the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras alongside the country's first woman president in its 200-year history.

During a public service career that has taken me around the world, including to Nicaragua as Ambassador, I have leaned on my family for their support.

My late husband and I raised two sons who both serve our nation – one with two combat tours in Afghanistan with the 75th Ranger Regiment and the other on the front lines of our nation's defense with the 82nd Airborne Division.

The United States has a strong and multifaceted partnership with Honduras. As Assistant Secretary Nichols testified, "too many ordinary citizens in the region's democracies saw their governments failing to meet their expectations and aspirations for a better future. Corruption remained rampant. Economies grew but so did inequality. Crime and insecurity took too many lives and stymied the region's development." The citizens of Honduras confronted these challenges and demonstrated their belief in democracy by voting in historic numbers on November 28.

If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. Congress and interagency, the Honduran government, international partners, civil society, and the private sector to promote a democratic Honduras with transparent institutions that fight corruption, narcotics trafficking, and organized crime to enhance security and address the root causes of migration, including through promoting human rights. I will work with those same diverse partners to reactivate the economy, enhance climate resilience, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic using all available tools, including the new Strategic Dialogue.

The U.S. government supports the new Honduran president's efforts to expand Honduran government efforts to reduce corruption, including through internationally-supported mechanisms. If confirmed, I will prioritize U.S. cooperation on those efforts.

Through DOD, DEA, and State's INL programs, the Embassy works to improve Honduras' ability to interdict drugs and disrupt drug trafficking and other transnational criminal networks. Honduras seized 17.8 metric tons of cocaine in 2021, up from 3.4 metric tons in 2020. The new administration's focus on citizen security presents an opportunity to cooperate with the highest levels of government in Honduras on this issue.

Honduras works with the United States, including DHS, to address irregular migration. Its efforts have included expanded document checks and checkpoints, strengthened reintegration

services for minors and families to deter recidivism, and acceptance of direct flights of migrants expelled from the United States under Title 42. Hondurans remain among the largest groups of Central Americans apprehended at the U.S. border, partially due to lack of economic opportunity at home.

The fourth poorest country in the hemisphere based on per capita GDP, Honduras struggles to attract investment. A low-skilled labor force, endemic corruption, and unpredictable regulations and judiciary complicate Honduras' efforts to become an investment destination. Poverty, corruption, and economic stagnation contribute to emigration. In addition to a 9 percent GDP contraction during the pandemic, two hurricanes hit the Sula Valley in November 2020, destroying agricultural and manufacturing centers. Our colleagues at U.S. Southern Command, Soto Cano Air Base, and USAID responded to address immediate survival needs. Food insecurity reached crisis levels in Honduras, prompting the U.S. embassy to declare emergencies in 2021 and 2022.

These hurricanes and an ongoing drought highlight the need for climate resilient infrastructure and industries. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted studies to help with recovery in the Sula Valley. If confirmed, I look forward to advancing a U.S. government-wide approach to help Honduras during its reconstruction and economic recovery.

Honduras faces many challenges on human rights, an issue that appears in the pillars of the U.S. Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration, and we have committed to helping Hondurans address these issues. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Department and Honduras held a high-level Bilateral Human Rights Working Group, which I look forward to resuming with the new government, if confirmed, within the context of the new Strategic Dialogue that will launch in April. U.S. embassy officials attend, when possible, human rights-related trials. Gender-based violence remains highly prevalent in Honduras. The latest UN femicide data show Honduras has the highest rate in Latin America with 6.2 per 100,000.

We promote Taiwan as a valuable partner. If confirmed, I will make clear the importance of the Honduras-Taiwan relationship and do all I can to enhance Honduras' partnerships with other democracies. We see an opportunity to align U.S. investment and development priorities with key democratic partners to help Honduras succeed.

In conclusion, if confirmed, I look forward to leading our Embassy in Tegucigalpa. My highest priorities will be to protect U.S. citizens and champion the interests of the United States in cooperation with our partners in Honduras.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee. I'm happy to answer your questions.