

Statement of Geeta Pasi
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Djibouti
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 7, 2011

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Isakson, Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary of State have shown by nominating me to this position, and for the support of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson.

First, Mr. Chairman, let me acknowledge several family members and colleagues here today. My sister, Rita Pasi, brother Peter Pasi, and his wife, Hallie Lewis, have all joined me. I am pleased to appear before you on this panel with my three colleagues, Don Koran, Lewis Lukens and Jeanine Jackson.

Mr. Chairman, please allow me to tell you about myself. My career has included challenging assignments that required me to adapt to rapidly changing environments. I have served in several countries in transition and was in Ghana during its first democratic elections and Romania shortly after the fall of Nicolae Ceaucescu. During a state of emergency, I helped steer Bangladesh toward democratic elections. In Washington, I served in several positions, including as the Afghanistan Desk Officer where I was working on September 11, 2001. I currently serve as Office Director for East African Affairs and have policy and program responsibility for 11 countries in East Africa.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading Embassy Djibouti in advancing U.S. interests with our team of Foreign and Civil Service personnel, military staff, and local employees. Our main interests in Djibouti are peace and security, good governance, and economic development.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, we share important interests and goals with Djibouti. An area of relative calm in a turbulent region and an important partner in the fight against terrorism, Djibouti is surrounded by Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, and is less than 18 miles from Yemen. It has a strategic position at the Bab el Mandab Strait, which joins the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and through which some 40 percent of the world's shipping passes. If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, I will continue to reinforce our bilateral relationship as well as contribute to efforts promoting a stable, functioning, and peaceful Somalia in coordination with our Mission in Nairobi.

Djibouti hosts the only U.S. military forward operating site in sub-Saharan Africa, Camp Lemonnier, the headquarters for the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and approximately 3,000 troops. I understand that you, Senator Isakson, and Senator Inhofe have visited Camp Lemonnier. If confirmed, I will continue and expand coordination and cooperation between Embassy personnel and Camp Lemonnier and its tenant commands, including the CJTF-HOA contingent. If confirmed, I will also ensure that CJTF-HOA programming in Djibouti fits within the framework of U.S. government priorities

to advance our key interests.

Mr. Chairman, Djibouti's Presidential election in April underscored the importance of democracy and governance reforms – including enlarging space for media and civil society groups that face constraints. If confirmed, I commit to work with our Djiboutian partners on these issues.

On the economic front, Mr. Chairman, Djibouti's leadership has privatized its excellent deep-water port and airport, reducing corruption and increasing revenue flows. Construction of a new port facility is underway and will dramatically increase capacity. Making Djibouti an attractive place for investment and center for regional and international trade is essential for its economic development. Djibouti remains very poor, ranked 149 out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index. Less than five percent of its land is arable. The small USAID mission in Djibouti focuses on governance and democracy, health and education, particularly to combat low life-expectancy, maternal and child mortality, and infectious disease. The United States responds to food insecurity through support for the Famine Early Warning Network office in Djibouti, as well as through USG-funded Food for Peace and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance programs. The United States has also been the leading donor in the area of democratic reform and good governance. If confirmed, I will continue to make these programs a priority.

Djibouti's sole troubled relationship in the region is with Eritrea. Although

Qatar's mediation efforts alleviated the conflict, the countries have not yet addressed the substantive issues of border demarcation. If confirmed, I will support international efforts to resolve this conflict peacefully and restore the border to the status quo ante.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my highest priority will be the protection of Americans and American business interests, including Mission personnel, living and traveling in Djibouti. With only a few private Americans in-country, I would, if confirmed, remain in frequent contact with them, on consular and security issues but also to benefit from their wisdom. In the fall, the Mission will move to a New Embassy Compound, meaning that all Mission personnel will work in the safest and most secure facilities available. Maintaining this technologically-advanced building in Djibouti will be a challenge, but I am committed to good stewardship of this significant USG investment.

Mr. Chairman, I believe my prior experience in the Foreign Service has prepared me to serve as Ambassador to Djibouti. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working closely with you and other members of the Committee, and would hope to welcome you during my tenure.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the honor to appear before the Committee today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.