

**Testimony of Christopher Dell
Ambassador-Designate to Kosovo
June 16, 2009
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the second United States Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo. It is a particularly great privilege to be entrusted with the responsibility of representing the President and Secretary Clinton in Kosovo, where I served in 2000 and 2001 as the second Chief of Mission of the U.S. Office. I last served in Kosovo at a critical time, immediately after the tragic events of the 1990s and in the aftermath of NATO's 1999 military intervention to end Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing operation. Resolution 1244 had been passed by the United Nations Security Council, and the UN had recently begun its mission of interim administration of Kosovo. It was a challenging time, but also a time of great hope and optimism. For me, it is a special honor to be able to return eight years later to an independent Kosovo and to be offered the chance to contribute to the further development of Europe's newest country.

Of course, since I left Pristina in 2001, I have faced a few other challenges. In Angola, where I served as the U.S. ambassador from 2001 to 2004, I had the rare privilege of signing the peace treaty which ended nearly forty years of conflict and helping in the process of rebuilding that war-torn land. I am especially proud of my tenure as Ambassador in Zimbabwe from 2004 to 2007, where as the President's representative I was thrust into the role of defending the hope of the Zimbabwean people for a better democratic future against the tyranny of Robert Mugabe and his henchmen. Finally, I have recently returned from a particularly challenging tour in Afghanistan, where I served as the Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy for the past two years. All of these assignments have been rewarding, but none of them have been easy, and I would like to take this moment to thank my family for their support.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Tina Kaidanow, the first U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo, for all she has done. She has worked tirelessly during her tenure to aid the Government of Kosovo in establishing a multi-ethnic democracy and building institutions. I know that

I will have to work very hard to build on Ambassador Kaidanow's achievements if confirmed.

Vice President Biden recently visited the Balkan region, including Kosovo. This early trip to Pristina was a clear signal of the Obama Administration's strong commitment to the success of an independent Kosovo, which remains a key element in our policy of helping develop a stable, viable future for the states of the Western Balkans, fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Kosovo has made much progress since I was last there. If confirmed, it will be a great honor to continue our efforts of further assisting in the development of a stable, prosperous, multi-ethnic democracy in Kosovo. I was there at the beginning of our work, when the international community was grappling with the challenges of establishing political institutions in Kosovo. If confirmed, I would be thrilled to return to a now independent Kosovo, recognized by sixty countries, including recently Saudi Arabia. Today, Kosovo's independence is irreversible.

Such success in Kosovo and the broader Balkans region is in large part due to Congress' continued support over the past ten years of building a Europe whole, free, and at peace, and, if confirmed, I will look forward to working closely with the members of this committee to achieve this goal, of which Kosovo is a significant inseparable piece. With your support, our team in Pristina will work to develop Kosovo into a net contributor to security, rather than a consumer of it; we will help Kosovo develop an economy able to compete in the 21st century, leaving behind crime and corruption rooted in the 20th century; we will work to attract investment, create jobs and establish a well-educated workforce. Everyone agrees that the key to Kosovo's economic development is a reliable and sustainable energy supply. In coordination with the World Bank, European partners, and the Government of Kosovo, we will continue to support privatization of the electric utility and the development of new energy and mining resources.

I want to stress that our policies are intended to improve the lives of all citizens of Kosovo, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. As the Vice President noted during his trip, "It is essential that the majority continues to reach out to Kosovo's Serb community, to build a dialogue and establish strong protections for that community and for other non-majority communities. As a country born from conflict, Kosovo has a special

responsibility to overcome the legacy of division, bitterness, and fear and mistrust within the country.” This includes improving the conditions for the return of displaced Serbs and members of other communities to their property and their homes throughout all of Kosovo.

Protecting holy sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as its rights as an institution, remains a priority, and we will continue to urge Kosovo to preserve those and other treasures of its rich, diverse cultural heritage. I was deeply engaged in efforts to support the Serb community and to promote inter-ethnic reconciliation during my first tour in Kosovo and, if confirmed, this will once again be one of my primary focuses. At the same time, we have to be clear: the success of these endeavors to protect minority communities and promote inter-ethnic reconciliation will depend at least as much on Serbia and Kosovo Serbs themselves. The latter should participate in Kosovo’s institutions and contribute to its future, while the former must abandon the pursuit of parallel structures which obstruct constructive engagement among Kosovo’s ethnic communities.

I believe it is one of an Ambassador’s major responsibilities to ensure that our assistance programs are well-designed and well-implemented. The American people and Congress deserve to see results from their investments. If confirmed, I will oversee U.S. assistance programs with four clear, broad goals: strengthening the rule of law, expanding economic development and sustainability, supporting democratic governance, and integrating Kosovo into Euro-Atlantic and regional security structures. Assistance is not an end in itself, but rather one of the most powerful tools we have to help Kosovo become the kind of country we all wish to see and one which contributes to its region and to Europe in the ways I described earlier. Our assistance already has produced tangible benefits to the citizens of Kosovo and to warm U.S.-Kosovo relations.

While the United States continues to play a leading role in Kosovo, we are not alone in this effort. The United States continues to work closely with our European partners to ensure that U.S. assistance complements other donor efforts. If we are successful in Kosovo and in our efforts throughout the Balkan region, we will not only help Kosovo, but also contribute to a stronger region and a stronger Europe. Creating a viable, stable future with membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions for all the countries of the Balkans region is key to achieving this goal.

We coordinate closely with our European partners and, indeed, Kosovo has emerged as a kind of proving ground for new developments in our cooperation with Europe. In 2008, we made the ground-breaking decision to participate for the first time in a European Security and Defense Policy mission and today there are approximately 80 American police officers, judges, and prosecutors serving proudly in the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). EULEX is working to foster professional and multi-ethnic customs, courts, and police structures throughout Kosovo. It has responded quickly and effectively to stop violence and provocation, as we have seen recently in Kosovo's north, and has taken the first steps toward re-establishing customs controls at Kosovo's northern gates.

The international community needs to continue to support Kosovo in its efforts to build strong institutions that embody the values enshrined in its Declaration of Independence and its Constitution. We continue to support and work closely with the International Civilian Office (ICO) in its role of supervising the full implementation of the Ahtisaari plan. Measures that will give municipal authorities and ethnic communities greater control over local affairs must be completed. Local elections are expected later this year; we hope they will build on an early record of free and fair elections in Kosovo. Kosovo will need our support to step up its efforts to fight corruption and organized crime -- problems for many emerging states and a particular challenge in the Balkan region.

The United States remains committed to Kosovo's security through NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission, which continues to play a critically important role in helping secure peace and stability. Nearly 1,500 U.S. Army National Guard troops contribute to NATO's force of nearly 14,000 service men and women from 25 Allies and eight partner nations. Under NATO's supervision and training, Kosovo is building security institutions, including the Kosovo Security Force and its Ministry, to NATO standards, as well as opening them to all Kosovo ethnic communities. Many in Congress have asked how long we will continue to have to keep troops on the ground in Kosovo, and it is a fair question. As someone who served in Pristina eight years ago when we had around 6,500 U.S. troops at Camp Bondsteel, I see today's smaller presence as a real sign of the progress we have made. This is not the end goal, of course, and in response to steady political progress and much improved security now, NATO Defense Ministers agreed in Brussels last Thursday to begin a gradual adjustment of KFOR's force presence. This phase represents a normal evolution of the

mission and will include a laddered approach in reducing KFOR's presence in Kosovo based on evolving conditions on the ground. This new phase reflects positively on Kosovo and demonstrates an increased level of political and security stability within the region.

I am encouraged by the progress Kosovo has made in its first sixteen months of independence. The Assembly of Kosovo has adopted numerous laws, including the nearly 50 mandated by the Ahtisaari plan, and the Government has established significant protections for minorities. Roads and schools have been built, ministries of government have been established, and the Kosovo Security Force has been activated with an initial operational capability date scheduled for September 2009. Kosovo has strengthened relationships with its neighbors and established embassies in ten countries, including a new embassy here in Washington. Kosovo recently achieved yet another milestone when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) offered Kosovo membership. We are also confident they will also be granted membership in the World Bank. These facts point to growing support within the international community for Kosovo's development. As the Vice President stressed in his speech before the Kosovo Assembly, the independence of Kosovo is "irreversible – absolutely irreversible."

Membership in international financial institutions will provide significant support for Kosovo's economic development and help integrate Kosovo into the global financial system. Together with our international partners, we will continue working with Kosovo and our international partners to help the Kosovo develop sound and sustainable economic policies.

If confirmed, I would be honored to have the opportunity to help President Obama and Secretary Clinton working with the members of this committee to promote our policies toward this critical region. One of the Administration's most important priorities is to complete the historic project of helping to extend stability, security, prosperity and democracy to all of Europe, of which Kosovo is an integral part. This objective, which has been supported by both Democratic and Republican administrations, of a Europe whole, free, and at peace has advanced significantly, but it has not yet been fully reached. I plan to be out there front and center, meeting not just with government officials, but with all elements of society and with all generations of Kosovo's public in a fully transparent mode, to help achieve this and our other foreign policy objectives. If confirmed, I look forward to

working with the Congress and this Committee, the Government of Kosovo, our European allies, the International Civilian Office, EULEX, NATO and the UN, as well as regional partners to meet our goals and build a more stable Balkan region.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I look forward to answering your questions.

