

**Testimony of Marie L. Yovanovitch
Ambassador-Designate to Armenia
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by the confidence that President Bush and Secretary Rice have shown in me by nominating me for the post of U.S. Ambassador to Armenia. If confirmed, I pledge to build on my 22 years of service to our country to protect and defend American interests in the increasingly vital region of the South Caucasus.

Only in the United States would it be possible for someone like me – a first generation immigrant to the United States -- to appear before you as an Ambassadorial nominee. My father fled the Soviets and then the Nazis. My maternal grandfather escaped from Russia after the revolution and raised his family in wartime Germany, where my mother grew up stateless. My parents brought me to this country in search of a safe harbor, a harbor that provided freedom and opportunity, dignity and respect.

The United States offered our family a second chance, just as so many Armenian-Americans received a second chance in our country after they were driven out of the Ottoman Empire. In no way do I want to equate my own family history with that of Americans of Armenian heritage here in the United States. But I do wish to convey that I understand from personal experience that the events of the past can haunt the present and that individuals, born a generation or more after apocalyptic events, seek recognition of the injustices of the past.

The U.S. government – and certainly I – acknowledges and mourns the mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced deportations that devastated over one and a half million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. The United States recognizes these events as one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, the “Medz Yeghern” or Great Calamity, as many Armenians refer to it. That is why every April the President honors the victims and expresses American solidarity with the Armenian people on Remembrance Day.

The Administration understands that many Americans and many Armenians believe that the events of the past that I have referred to should be called

“genocide.” It has been President Bush’s policy, as well as that of previous presidents of both parties, not to use that term. The President’s focus is on encouraging Turkish citizens to reconcile with their past and with the Armenians. He seeks to support the painstaking progress achieved to date.

President Bush believes that the best way to honor the victims is to remember the past, so it is never repeated, and to look to the future to promote understanding and reconciliation between the peoples and governments of Armenia and Turkey. A key part of that effort is to end Armenia’s isolation in the region by encouraging normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and the opening of their land border. The Armenian government has requested that we facilitate this process. It will not be easy nor will it likely be quick, but there are some hopeful signs. President Bush believes that normalization can and should be achieved. The result would be an improvement in the life of every Armenian.

If I am confirmed, my priority would be to support the efforts of the United States in working towards regional stability by facilitating Armenian-Turkish relations and a peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan. Armenia is isolated from its second largest neighbor, Turkey, and every year scores of soldiers die along the line of contact with Azeri forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. The status quo in both situations is unacceptable, a deterioration unthinkable and clearly not in U.S. or regional interests.

Some progress has been made in both areas recently. Success would bring security to Armenia and great economic opportunities. This is a goal worth pursuing, and, if confirmed, I would give it my utmost attention -- not only by supporting government-to-government discussions -- but by promoting people-to-people contacts and partnerships, and other cross-border and regional initiatives. Contact begins to build trust, and trust is the necessary first step to reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Promoting good governance in Armenia is also a key U.S. goal. The conduct of the recent presidential elections and their violent aftermath in which ten individuals died were deeply disturbing. The path towards democracy is rarely fast or smooth. Our aim is to help the Armenian government and the Armenian people restore democratic momentum and to renew their own stated mission of moving forward to become a country

where government institutions are fully transparent and accountable and where rule of law is accepted by all.

It is important that the Armenian government support an independent, objective, and inclusive investigation into the fateful events of March 1 and release those who have been held on politically-motivated charges. It is important that the judiciary becomes truly independent. It is important that freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of expression are fully protected. It is important that the Armenian authorities show the will to move forward with a reform program that is responsive to the legitimate desires of the people and that inspires public confidence in the country's political and economic processes.

We are looking at how our democracy programs can be more targeted -- better supporting civil society, watchdog organizations, the independent media, and development of the internet. Our programs will continue to focus on anti-corruption efforts and strengthening the rule of law.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Agreement in 2006 demonstrated our belief that Armenia was fulfilling MCC's required criteria in the three broad areas of ruling justly, investing in people, and economic freedom. MCC is a performance-based program for governments that demonstrate commitment in these areas. In Armenia, the MCC Compact is a poverty-reduction program that focuses on building roads, improving the irrigation infrastructure and training farmers. The program will eventually benefit 750,000 people, 75 percent of whom live in rural areas.

This is an important program, and we have urged the new Armenian government to act quickly to improve its standing in the 9 of 17 indicators that it currently fails. The U.S. government is committed to assisting Armenia in this process, but it is up to the Armenian government to take the necessary steps, so that the Compact program could continue.

The Armenian economy has seen great success and double digit growth over the last six years. Our assistance programs -- through technical assistance to improve the regulatory and legislative framework, through strengthening of the private sector, and through training in many sectors of the economy -- have contributed at least in part to this success.

Over the last four years, Armenia has contributed to global security by providing peacekeepers in both Kosovo and Iraq. In fact, the size of Armenia's contingent in Kosovo was doubled just last week. By supporting Armenia's defense sector reform and greater cooperation with NATO, we enhance Armenia's ability to assist in peacekeeping operations and to work with coalition forces to combat global terrorism and make the world a safer place.

Armenia remains committed to overflight and landing rights for U.S. military aircraft and has worked to improve its capacity to combat both money laundering and terrorism financing. These are efforts we have strongly supported. Our assistance for Armenia's work to strengthen its borders and combat illegal trade in arms, weapons of mass destruction, drugs, and people is important to regional stability.

Our relationship with Armenia is broad and deep, both on a bilateral level and between our peoples. The United States was among the first to recognize Armenia's independence, and the first to establish an Embassy in Yerevan. Over the past seventeen years, the United States has provided close to \$2 billion in assistance and materially improved the lives of millions of Armenians. While challenges remain, we expect our partnership will continue to strengthen, and that we will continue to cooperate in all areas.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will do everything in my power to ensure that U.S. interests are promoted and protected, that the bilateral relationship flourishes, and that Armenia's isolation ends and regional stability is enhanced.

Thank you.