

Testimony of Miguel H. Diaz
Ambassador-Designate to The Holy See
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 22, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of this distinguished Committee,

Thank you for considering my nomination to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See. It is a great honor, and I am humbled by the trust and confidence President Obama and Secretary Clinton have placed in me. I would also like to thank Senator Amy Klobuchar from my home state of Minnesota for taking the time to offer these kind words of introduction. Of course, this moment would also not be possible without my family, which is here to support me today: my wife Marian and my children, Joshua, Ana, Mani, and Miguel David.

Mr. Chairman, as is the case with so many other Americans, I am inspired by President Obama's challenge to become more engaged in public service. If confirmed by the Senate, I stand ready to assume a new set of responsibilities. I offer my personal history, my academic work on human identity and community relations, my expertise in Roman Catholic social teaching, and my proven commitment to public service as qualifications for continuing to build upon and deepen the 25 years of formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the Holy See.

In his speech in Cairo in June, President Obama reminded us that our country is "shaped by every culture, drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept: E pluribus unum: 'Out of many, one.'" Given the Vatican's international reach and the diversity within the Catholic Church, our diplomatic relationship provides a wonderful opportunity to give global expression to these words.

My personal background is proof of this fundamental American value. As a Cuban-American, my identity has been shaped by two cultures. I strongly believe this has made me more open to others. Speaking various languages and interacting with diverse communities in the places I have lived has always been a part of my life. If confirmed, I would draw upon these experiences to build bridges between different communities on behalf of our country.

As a scholar and educator, I have focused on the relationship between religion and human identity, including how social and political experiences shape that identity. These same themes are also evident in Pope Benedict XVI's latest encyclical, which addresses the social challenges of our time.

My experience is not limited to the realm of books, articles, and the classroom. My commitment to public action and service has inspired me to play a leading role in promoting cultural, racial, and religious diversity on American college campuses. At the College of Saint Benedict/St. John's University, I have worked with religious leaders to engage local communities in exploring the role of religion in uniting people. If confirmed, my service to the United States as ambassador would be a natural extension of this work.

If confirmed, I will also lead an accomplished group of Foreign Service officers and Locally Engaged Staff. My ability as a team leader has been tested in various elected and administrative positions, serving on boards and steering committees of scholarly and educational organizations such as the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, of which I was president. I have also served as Academic Dean of Saint Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary and have chaired a number of committees charged with advancing issues of racial and cultural diversity, including the graduate Multi-Cultural Committee and the Intercultural Directions Council at Saint John's University.

Since President Reagan established formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See 25 years ago, our relationship has been characterized by both its breadth and depth, as together we have promoted human rights and religious freedom, addressed the effects of globalization, and sought the peaceful end to regional conflicts.

Our present challenges require increasingly close cooperation between multiple national and non-governmental actors. The role of the Holy See is crucial in this context: as a sovereign entity with an extensive diplomatic network; as an actor on the ground through Catholic humanitarian organizations; and as a moral voice. The United States continues to engage with the Holy See on global challenges as disparate as climate change, nonproliferation, treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, seeking peace in the Middle East, fighting trafficking in

persons, and supporting human rights and religious freedom worldwide. In their recent meeting, President Obama and Pope Benedict XVI discussed some of these common challenges and how the United States and the Holy See can work toward peace and prosperity around the world.

President Obama noted in his speech in Cairo on June 4 that “we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action.” The common values of human dignity and responsibility can guide discussion with faith communities toward action for the greater good. If confirmed, I intend to undertake such efforts to build connections based on these common values and explore with the Holy See how we can jointly further the cause of peace and address other global challenges.

My personal and academic commitment to creating dialogues related to cultural diversity, immigration, poverty, and the role of religion in society prepares me well for this endeavor. While we honor and uphold the valued American relationship between church and state, it is essential for the United States to maintain collaboration with faith communities around the world, to explain our policies and to involve them in advancing our shared priorities. President Bush and now President Obama have both reflected this in their support for faith-based and community initiatives.

If confirmed, I would embrace President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s diplomatic vision of leading through active listening and learning from others to seek common ground in order to further the myriad mutual interests of the United States and the Holy See.

Once again, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity and am honored to appear before you. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the other members of Congress in advancing U.S. policy and interests. I am happy to answer your questions.

