

**Testimony of Patricia Butenis
Ambassador-Designate to Sri Lanka and Maldives
June 16, 2009
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure and honor to appear before you today to discuss my nomination to be Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Ambassador to Maldives. I would like to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for their support and nomination. In addition, I would also like to thank my family, my mother and sisters and their families for their constant support. They could not be here today but I would not be where I am today without them.

My career in the Foreign Service has spanned nearly thirty years. I have proudly served my country both in Washington and abroad. I have just returned from a 23-month tour as Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad, where I managed one of our country's highest foreign policy priorities on a daily basis. I have served several tours in South Asia, most recently as Ambassador to Bangladesh, in addition to my tours as Deputy Chief of Mission in Islamabad, Pakistan and previous tours in New Delhi and Karachi.

If confirmed, I look forward to furthering U.S. strategic objectives in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Both countries have recently undergone historic changes, and I hope to have the chance to work with Congress to promote positive ways forward in our relationships with each country.

Sri Lanka has recently declared military victory in its 26- year conflict with the Tamil Tigers. There are now over 280,000 displaced persons living in camps in Sri Lanka's north, and the humanitarian situation continues to be of paramount concern. The Sri Lankan government now has an historic opportunity to bring lasting peace by addressing the legitimate grievances of the Tamil people and finding a political solution that will ensure equality and justice for all Sri Lankans. They should not miss this chance to set the course for lasting peace.

The immediate challenge facing Sri Lanka and the international community is caring for the large number of displaced persons currently in camps in the north. The U.S. government has contributed generously to this humanitarian effort and will continue to press the Sri Lankan government to provide unfettered access to all those in need of humanitarian assistance. The expeditious and voluntary return of displaced families to their land in safety and dignity will be an important step in

sustaining the peace dividend. However, political reconciliation is required to sustain the peace over the long term.

The Sri Lankan government must begin addressing legitimate Tamil grievances, including articulating a political vision inclusive of the aspirations of all Sri Lankans -- all religions and ethnic groups. In order to secure a lasting peace, the Sri Lankan government must seriously address previous human rights abuses, including establishing accountability and rule of law by bringing to justice those responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and the numerous attacks against press freedom that have occurred in the last several years.

The United States Ambassador in Colombo is also accredited to the Republic of Maldives, a nation of 1,200 coral islands with a total land area about one and one half times that of Washington, DC, and a population similar in size to Arlington, Virginia. Maldives is a moderate Muslim country well-disposed to the United States; it has cooperated closely with us in fighting terrorism. In 2008, the U.S. supported Maldives in its transition to democracy when it held its first genuine multi-party democratic elections in 27 years. The new President has a background as a human rights defender and continues to make reforms that protect the rights of Maldivians. As democracy takes hold, the Maldives looks to the international community to partner in areas of border protection, climate change, and economic development. It will be my job, if I am confirmed, to further strengthen the good relationship we have with Maldives, and to work with the government to further its goals of economic prosperity and environmental protection.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

