

**STATEMENT OF SAMUEL L. KAPLAN
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE
KINGDOM OF MOROCCO
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

July 22, 2009, 9 a.m.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a truly meaningful honor to appear before you today. I deeply appreciate the trust and confidence placed in me by President Obama and Secretary Clinton in nominating me as ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco.

My story is an American story. Like so many, I came from a working class family. My father, while still a youth, fled from Russia to escape the pogroms. My mother's Sephardic Jewish family came from Spain a century earlier, also to escape religious persecution. My parents married at the height of the Depression, and in the years that followed, struggled to make a living. Yet what I remember about growing up in that modest home is the warmth and support of my family and neighborhood and the rich heritage it provided.

As the first-born son, my parents dreamed big dreams for me and they became my dreams. In my family, of course, dreams didn't just happen; they were about hard work. As an aggressive young shoe salesman, working my way through college, I earned a bachelor's degree in business administration, and then a law degree, all from a land grant college, the University of Minnesota.

Serving as President of the Minnesota Law Review was a test of stamina as much as intellect. My 48 years of practicing law has been a continuation of that heady time. I have had an amazing and rewarding career as a lawyer.

I have had many other business interests beyond the practice of law. Primarily they have been in the world of banking and nursing home/assisted living industries. These involvements have provided broader understanding of the business and financial world and most particularly the nature of the health care

industry. Although each experience was distinctly different, all had in common the need for strong leadership.

All of this has enabled me and my wife, Sylvia, a woman of many talents and experiences, and now a restaurateur, to gather people at our home for the support of civic, cultural, and political causes. Our home is the place in our community where disparate groups, large and small, come together to promote the cause of economic and social justice.

My parents of course would have been proud to be here today, as would so many of my teachers and mentors. I owe them all so much. Most especially I would like to introduce my partner in all things, my wife, Sylvia. Other members of our large family of six children, their spouses, and 13 grandchildren are also here, and I owe them so much also.

As the President noted in his June 4 speech in Cairo, Morocco was the first nation to recognize our country. Two hundred and twenty-two years ago this month, the Continental Congress ratified a Treaty of Peace and Friendship – the longest unbroken treaty relationship in United States history – which offered certain protections to American citizens in Morocco. If confirmed, protecting Americans and American interests in Morocco will be among my highest priorities.

Our longstanding relationship has produced several milestones that demonstrate the depth and breadth of our close relationship. Morocco is a major non-NATO ally, has a thriving Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., and signed a \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact in 2007.

Morocco is on a positive path of development, but it faces important challenges. Many of the young men involved in the 2003 bombings in Casablanca and the Madrid train bombings the following year grew up in Moroccan slums. While the Moroccan government has been successful in finding, arresting and prosecuting terrorist cells over the years, the specter of transnational terrorism has grown significantly in the region. These facts make it all the more important for Morocco to continue to address the problems that cause young people to lose faith in their system and communities – through better education and employment opportunities, and through an environment where Moroccans feel they are real stakeholders in their government and their society.

Morocco's continued development, and even its stability, depend on the political, economic and social reforms that King Mohammed VI has championed since he

assumed power ten years ago. One of his initiatives regarding the Family Law led to a dialogue on women's rights that challenged social norms, leading to significant positive changes in the treatment of women and children. On June 12 of this year, elections seated 3,406 women – 12.4% of the total – in 1,500 local councils across Morocco. Many of them learned how to campaign from U.S. programs. The U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement has doubled bilateral trade, and the MCC Compact and the development work of the U.S. Agency for International Development will expand opportunities for millions of Moroccans to lift themselves out of poverty and play productive roles in Morocco's future. Growing press freedom in Morocco, one example of which is the opening in recent years of a vibrant independent radio sector, also warrants continued support through U.S. public diplomacy initiatives. It is in our long-term national interest to continue this effective partnership with the Moroccan government and people as they face the challenge of violent extremism, while making increasing strides toward a more democratic, more transparent and more inclusive society that respects human rights.

The Moroccan government also sees that its future depends on the development of the region. Increasing trade among the countries of North Africa could lead to greater levels of economic development than they can achieve alone. Improving cooperation among them can help them all better cope with illegal migration, trafficking and extremism. However, one of the major impediments to improved cooperation among North African countries has been the issue of Western Sahara. If I am confirmed as Ambassador to Morocco, I will fully support the efforts of the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy to work with Morocco and other parties in the region toward a just, lasting and mutually-acceptable political solution. If confirmed, I will continue our efforts to promote partnership, expand U.S. exports, promote human rights, counter extremism, reinforce military cooperation and peacekeeping, and of course, to protect Americans living abroad.

Finally, I want to express how humbled I am to be nominated to serve in a Muslim country with a history of tolerance toward people of other faiths. As a Jewish American, I understand the importance of President Obama's initiative to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, and I believe Morocco is an ideal country to continue to further the effort of finding common ground. If confirmed, I will do all that I can to further deepen our relations with this strategic ally, key partner and enduring friend.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for this opportunity to address you. I welcome any questions you may have.