

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE
VINAI THUMMALAPALLY
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

July 15, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee thank you for granting me the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Belize. It is a profound honor. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Congress to serve the interests of the United States.

With the Committee's indulgence, I would like to introduce my wife, Barbara who is sitting behind me prepared and excited to move to Belize to serve our country. Like President Obama and Secretary Clinton, I am proud to be part of the "new face" of America. I moved to the U.S. from Hyderabad, India when I was 19 years old. After completing my engineering degree, I decided to live and work in the United States. Most recently, for the past 13 years, I have run a mid-size optical disc firm. If confirmed, I will be the first Indian American Ambassador to lead a United States mission abroad. I believe my international background and my leadership role in the business community will make me an effective advocate and interlocutor of our interests in Belize and facilitate interactions with Belizeans.

The United States is Belize's principal trading partner, a major source of investment funds, and its largest provider of economic and military assistance. Approximately 5,000 American citizens live in Belize, almost a million visit annually, and the U.S. is home to the largest Belizean community outside Belize. Recently, Belize has played a constructive role at the Organization of American States in addressing the political crisis in Honduras.

We have a strong foundation, but there is still work to be done. It will be one of my top priorities to work with the Belizean Government and people to fight the growing threats of crime and narcotics trafficking. If confirmed, I will look for ways to increase the effectiveness of programs that aim to strengthen Belize's domestic law enforcement and judicial institutions and capacity to better conduct regional operations with partner countries throughout the Caribbean Basin.

Often the best and most sustainable investment is one in people. Providing the tools – from working with local schools, to collaborating with NGOs, and encouraging international exchanges – is an excellent way to strengthen long term relations. If confirmed, I will use my professional background and interest in microfinance to facilitate partnerships with underserved populations.

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for this potential opportunity to serve in the United States Government. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to strengthening

the relationship the United States has with a good friend. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.