

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN G. MCFARLAND  
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO GUATEMALA  
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

April 16, 2008

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee,

It is a great honor to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Rice for the trust and confidence they have shown in sending my nomination to you. I would like to introduce my wife, Karin, and to thank her for her support throughout our Foreign Service experience. I would also like to introduce my sons, Christopher, Alexander, Andrew, and Kevin, and to thank them for their support and inspiration.

I am a second-generation Foreign Service Officer with 31 years of service; I have served nine times in Latin America, mostly in countries with insurgencies, political strife, and post-conflict challenges. My earlier assignments in El Salvador and Peru showed me the human costs when democracy falters and social cohesion fails. As Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé in Guatemala from 2000 to 2003, I worked closely with a broad range of Guatemalans on bilateral issues. My most recent assignment was as Team Leader of a Provincial Reconstruction Team embedded with the 2nd Marine Regiment in western Iraq. I saw the accomplishments of interagency leadership and teamwork, and I bear witness to the dedication and sacrifices of Americans and Iraqis. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would use this experience to lead an active interagency Embassy team.

The United States' overarching objective in Guatemala is to support democracy. Democracy in turn requires security, prosperity, and the rule of law; these objectives are mutually reinforcing.

Guatemalans ended their internal conflict through the 1996 Peace Accords. Out of the ashes of a cruel war, they embarked on an admirable—but unfinished—effort to incorporate all citizens of all ethnic groups and social classes into Guatemala’s democratic society.

Guatemala’s democracy faces great challenges: corruption and organized crime; impunity and human rights abuses; drug and gang violence; and extreme poverty, including child mortality and malnutrition rates in some areas among the worst in the hemisphere. The United States has worked as partners with successive Guatemalan governments and civil society on these interrelated issues, and both countries agree that major progress is vital. If confirmed, I am committed to working with this committee, with all executive branch agencies, and with the government of Guatemala and other groups to continue our efforts to address these challenges.

President Álvaro Colom took office in January 2008 and is building upon Guatemala’s friendly relations with the United States. He has pledged to help the poor and the indigenous, and to improve security and transparency. In January 2008, Guatemala and the United Nations inaugurated the Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala. As President Bush said when he visited Guatemala a year ago, “strong democracy requires security from drug lords and violent criminals.” The United States provides Guatemala cooperation in law enforcement, and the Merida Initiative—if approved by the Congress—would significantly increase our cooperation on law enforcement and citizen security issues of mutual concern.

The CAFTA-DR Free Trade Agreement entered into force in Guatemala in July 2006. It has increased trade, and President Bush’s March 2007 visit to Guatemala underscored the ability of non-traditional producers in indigenous areas to improve their standard of living under CAFTA. However, greater security, transparency, and infrastructure are needed to encourage more investment and trade. Health and education—two issues that President Bush raised during his

visit—also need more investment to foster the workforce Guatemala needs to take full advantage of the trade agreement. If confirmed, I will be work closely with the Guatemalan government, and with Guatemalan and American businesses, on our mutual interests in trade and economic opportunities.

Civil society, including the private sector, plays an important role in Guatemala. The ties between Guatemalan and American civil society strengthen our bilateral relations. If confirmed, I would seek to support these bonds, including through additional public diplomacy outreach.

Some 350,000 Americans visit Guatemala each year, and another 25,000 Americans live there. Many Americans are close to Guatemala as the birthplace of their adopted children; in the last ten years, Americans have adopted over 25,000 Guatemalan children. If confirmed, two of my top priorities would be the safety of American citizens, and support for a transparent, efficient adoption process in accordance with Guatemalan and American laws. Embassy Guatemala has some 400 American and Guatemalan employees who work in a dozen agencies, as well as 200 Peace Corps volunteers; their safety and support would also be a major concern of mine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

