

**Opening Statement of Goli Ameri
January 30, 2008**

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Hearing on Nomination as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational
and Cultural Affairs**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would also like to thank Senator Smith of the Great state of Oregon for being here today and for his kind words of introduction.

I would like to begin by recognizing the members of my family who are sitting behind me for their love and support. Joining me here today are my husband Jim and my son Darius. My second son Sherwin could not be here and I am proud to say that he is in New Orleans building homes for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. My parents are both elderly and unfortunately could not be here either but I want to thank them for their ever-present love and support and their foresight in sending me to the United States for my higher education.

It is also a great pleasure to be seated before the Committee today with David Kramer to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, as well as a gentleman who I've gotten to know well in the last few weeks and who I will have the pleasure to work with in the coming year, Jim Glassman, nominated to be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

I am honored by the trust and confidence shown to me by President Bush and Secretary Rice in putting my name forward to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

I believe that my background and experience will enable me to carry on the proud tradition of excellence at the Bureau.

First and foremost, there is who I am—an American by choice. I was born and raised in Tehran, Iran and came to the United States to attend Stanford University--one of the 100,000 international students who embarked for the U.S. in 1974. When the revolution in Iran happened in 1979, there were thousands of us studying in America whose futures were put in doubt. But even in our gloomiest moments, we knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel because we were armed with a first class education we had gained right here in the United States. Our education not only propelled us to success, but it also taught us many valuable life lessons. Among the myriad of things I learned and they are too numerous to list, was the value of freedom and democracy, the fundamentals of critical thinking, the questioning of ideas and a profound sense of empowerment. I learned that in America, there are no constraints to one's desire to achieve. That it's ok to be a woman, its ok to be an immigrant and most importantly its ok to be a dreamer.

Where else in the world, would an immigrant, a woman of Iranian heritage be nominated as an Assistant Secretary and have the privilege to sit in front of this distinguished panel?

The idea of America is alive and well and strong as ever. Education and culture are among America's greatest soft power assets—assets recognized around the world. These programs allow us to demonstrate American values, not just assert them. I am delighted that President Bush and Secretary Rice have emphasized that public diplomacy and exchanges are top priorities for the State Department and for foreign affairs in general.

I understand both personally and professionally what Secretary Rice means when she speaks of the transformational power of education and exchange. I have experienced it first hand and if confirmed, it would be not only be a tremendous privilege to lead the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs but to have first hand responsibility to promote these values overseas.

If confirmed, I am committed to strengthening the many achievements of the Department's educational and cultural exchanges. I intend to expand our people to people exchanges and introduce 1. More opportunities for engagement with key countries like Iran and North Korea where we seek to better relations between our citizens and 2. Reach out to the more disadvantaged segments of the population around the world. I will encourage more women and girls, to participate in our exchange programs and I would like to make sure that we institutionalize successful and powerful programs like the Middle East Breast Cancer Initiative and the Fortune Women's Mentorship program.

Coming from the private sector, I know that the challenges of the 21st century cannot be addressed by the government alone. I have been delighted to see that Public-private collaboration is a significant part of the organizational culture at ECA with hundreds of partners among NGOs, businesses and academic institutions. ECA has made significant progress in creatively expanding these public-private partnerships with impressive new undertakings, such as with the Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists, the Global Cultural Initiative, American Public Diplomacy Envoys, and engagement with America's higher education community. My goal is to engage and enlist the private sector and private foundations more fully to expand our number one public diplomacy tool: exchanges and teaching English abroad.

I would also like to expand our outreach to ethnic communities in the United States to listen to their ideas about expanding our exchanges and finding creative ways to have them represent us overseas. If confirmed, I will also be looking for effective ways to engage the eight hundred thousand plus strong alumni of ECA programs who are often America's best friends.

Having two young sons and coming from a technology background, I have come to understand the incredible power of this industry in attracting youth around the world and one of my goals is to further harness this power in achieving the goals of the ECA. Our challenge is to build mass in reaching out to the world and today the Internet is our most significant ally.

And, of course last but not least, I am committed to investing in and recognizing the hard work and expertise of all PD professionals who are responsible for much of the success of our programs, and coming from the private sector, my commitment to you will be to ensure that the resources allocated to ECA are spent wisely, effectively and with maximum impact.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we all know that these are challenging times for public diplomacy. But I am hopeful about our activities, because after all what we are promoting is the idea of America – our people’s commitment to freedom and democracy, to honesty and integrity, to trust and most of all to tolerance. There is still not a day that goes by that I don’t feel a surge of joy, a thankfulness for being a part of this commitment. It is indeed a joy worth sharing with others. I look forward to working with all of you and your staff to spread the powerful message of our values all over the world. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and look forward to your questions.