

**Statement of Colleen Bell
Ambassador-Designate to Hungary
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 16, 2014**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

It is an honor for me to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Hungary.

I am deeply grateful for the confidence and trust that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me. I am humbled by this opportunity, and if confirmed, I will proudly represent our country abroad.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to acknowledge the presence of some of my family members who were able to join me here today. I would particularly like to thank my husband, Bradley, for his steadfast and unwavering support in this new endeavor. I would also like to thank my father. A former United States Marine, he instilled in me the importance of hard work and integrity in achieving my goals. My passion for public service is driven by our shared hopes for a better world for our next generation, a world that we build with the friendship and cooperation of our partners and allies.

Hungary is a strong ally of the United States. We enjoy a close partnership embedded in our common commitment to two bedrock transatlantic organizations – the OSCE and NATO. Inspired by shared interests and common values, Hungary has been a generous and reliable contributor to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Hungary also contributes peacekeeping troops to the international mission in Kosovo and to EU operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hungary has been an active and constructive supporter of U.S. efforts to broker a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestine Authority and of the ongoing international program to disarm the Syrian chemical weapons program. Police and civilian security cooperation has been excellent, as exemplified by the presence of the US-sponsored International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Budapest.

Last year marked the 90th anniversary of U.S.-Hungarian diplomatic relations. That anniversary gave us an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on our

partnership – a relationship which extends beyond our common interest in security as NATO allies and is anchored by deep economic ties and common values shared by the citizens of our two nations.

At the same time, we have been open over the last two years about our concerns about the state of checks and balances in Hungary and the independence of some key institutions. Many argue that sweeping legislative and constitutional changes have hurt the international investment climate, undermined property rights, weakened the judiciary, and centralized power in the hands of the executive. The United States has not been alone in this regard. The perceived erosion of democratic checks and balances has garnered scrutiny from various bodies within the European Union. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to uphold American and European democratic values, to express our concerns where appropriate, and to urge our Hungarian partners to work collaboratively with international partners and civil society on these issues.

The idea of pluralism is integral to our understanding of what it means to be a democracy. Democracies recognize that no one entity -- no state, no political party, no leader -- will ever have all the answers to the challenges we face. And, depending on their circumstances and traditions, people need the latitude to work toward and select their own solutions. Our democracies do not and should not look the same. Governments by the people, for the people, and of the people will reflect the people they represent. But we all recognize the reality and importance of these differences. Pluralism flows from these differences.

The United States has also expressed concern about the rise of extremism which unfortunately is a trend not unique to Hungary. However, the rise in Hungary of extremist parties is of particular concern. If confirmed, protecting and promoting a climate of tolerance will be one of my key priorities.

The Hungarian government has undertaken a series of steps to address lingering hatred and the legacy of the Holocaust, to include planned events in 2014 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the large scale deportations to Auschwitz, and the 2015 assumption of the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. If confirmed, I look forward to working with government organizations, civic and religious groups, and other stakeholders to confront and defeat prejudice and hatred in all of its forms.

We have enjoyed and benefited from our close relationship with Hungary for over 90 years. Just as we continue to work together in Afghanistan and around the

world to uphold freedom and democracy, so too will we work to maintain an open – and at times difficult – dialogue on the importance of upholding our shared values at home.

I bring to the table two decades of experience as a businesswoman, executive manager, and leader in the nonprofit arena. As a producer I have been an integral part in developing a U.S. product that we export to more than 100 countries for daily consumption with more than 40 million viewers. The demands of producing a daily show have honed my managerial skills and required me to carefully coordinate the diverse activities of a very large staff. My work in the non-profit sector has left me with a deep appreciation for the role and the importance of civil society in a healthy democracy.

If confirmed, I will give the highest priority to ensuring the well-being of U.S. citizens living, working, and traveling in Hungary and I will also seek opportunities to enhance our cooperation on international security issues, and to expand commercial opportunities for American firms while also firmly promoting and protecting our shared values and principles.

If confirmed, I pledge to do my best in advancing America's interests and values. I look forward to working with this Committee and Congress in that effort.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.