

Press Releases: Remarks at the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) Memorial Plaque Ceremony

Remarks
Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

C Street Lobby
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AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON: Good afternoon, and welcome. Please be seated, oh, if you can. I'm Barbara Stephenson, president of the American Foreign Service Association. Thank you for joining us here today as we gather to pay tribute to our colleagues who lost their lives while serving our country overseas. It has been over 80 years since these plaques were unveiled by then Secretary of State Henry Stimson. More recently, the Senate in 1996 passed a resolution

calling for the first Friday of May to be recognized as American Foreign Service Day. That resolution had 54 cosponsors from both parties, showing broad bipartisan support for the idea of strong American global leadership, and for the Foreign Service.

I want to thank Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for being with us today. And also thank Under – yes. (Applause.) And we also want to thank Under Secretary of State Tom Shannon for being with us today. (Applause.) Their presence speaks volumes about the importance that we in this community place on remembering and honoring those among us who do not make it home. Last year, we had the good fortune of not having to add a name to the plaques. Sadly, that is not the case this year. Andy Jordan and Selena Nelson-Salcedo were valued members of our community, doing the work they loved on behalf of our country. This year, we honor them by adding their names to AFSA's memorial plaques. Andy and Selena's families, friends and colleagues are here today in large numbers. Thank you all for being with us today.

We in the Foreign Service pledge to do our best to manage the risks that are inherent in our mission. We also confirm by our presence today that members of the Foreign Service who die while serving our country abroad will be remembered and honored for their service and sacrifice. The presence of so many distinguished colleagues and guests demonstrates that commitment.

I want to welcome, in particular, USAID Administrator Mark Green; Foreign Agricultural Service Administrator Ken Isley; APHIS Associate Administrator Dr. Michael Watson; Broadcasting Board of Governors Chief of Staff Matt Walsh; USAID Counselor Tom Staal; Under Secretary Andrea Thompson; Assistant Secretaries of State Dan Smith, Manisha Singh and Carl Risch; Deputy Under Secretary for Management Bill Todd; Acting Assistant Secretaries Francisco Palmieri, Don Yamamoto, Judith Garber, Susan Thornton, James Walsh, Alice Wells, and Mike Kozak; deputy chief of mission at the embassy of the Slovak Republic Jozef Polakovic; Adam Sterling, U.S. ambassador to the Slovak Republic; other members of the department's leadership, Doctor Mark Cohen, Will Moser, Karen Mummaw, Molly Phee, Anita Friedt, and Christian Sherman, and Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

As you know, more than two thirds of the Foreign Service is stationed abroad at any given moment. For the second year, we have invited those colleagues to join our commemoration today, by participating in moments of silence at posts around the world at noon local time. Members of the Foreign Service joined us in observing a moment of silence in honor of our fallen colleagues in embassies and consulates in Abu Dhabi, Accra, Amman, Ankara, Athens, Baghdad, Bratislava, Cairo, Canberra, Caracas, Conakry, Dakar, Dili, Doha, Dublin, Geneva, Georgetown, The Hague, Harare, Kabul, Kolkata, Kuala Lumpur, Lima, Lisbon, Ljubljana, N'Djamena, New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Panama City, Port of Spain, Praia, Rangoon, Reykjavik, Singapore, Tbilisi, Vilnius, Warsaw, and many others.

This moment of silence that we observe each year is never easy. Our losses are real and we feel them deeply. The pride we feel in our mission is also real. We know that for America to lead, we must be present. I'm confident that those we honor today would want us to remain steadfast, be present, and

keep the American flag flying at posts around the world. Before we offer our own moment of silence, I would like to ask everyone to please stand as the United States Armed Forces Color Guard present the colors.

(The Colors were presented.)

I ask that you remain standing for a moment of silence in honor of our fallen colleagues, and then for the National Anthem. Fellow Foreign Service officer Katie Nutt will bring us out of the moment of silence by singing the Star Spangled Banner. Katie asks that we all join her in singing the final phrase, on the back of your programs, beginning, "Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave."

Now please join me and our colleagues at embassies and consulates around the globe in observing a Moment of Silence in honor of our fallen colleagues.

(A Moment of Silence was observed.)

(The National Anthem was sung.)

AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON: Thank you, Katie. Please, be seated. Our anthem asks, "Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave?" The answer to that question is and must remain, "Yes." The answer to that question – as the photos from the moments of silence held at embassies and consulates around the globe show, the Star-Spangled Banner continues to wave proudly – a visible demonstration of America's global leadership. I invite you to join me in committing to ensuring we can say the same thing next year and a decade from now and 20 years from now.

I would now like to invite our Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to the podium. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you so much, Ambassador Stephenson, for hosting this important service. I am grateful to see so many leaders here, as the ambassador mentioned, from throughout the department and indeed leaders throughout our government.

Thank you for joining us as we pay tribute to our colleagues, our friends, our family members, who have died in service to our nation.

This wall to my rear stands as a reminder that sacrifice is part of our department's culture. It's part of our DNA. The 248 names behind me represent lives lived – not for their own glory or their own good – but for the good of others, for promoting peace and prosperity in selfless service to their fellow Americans.

I'm reminded of a verse from Scripture. The book of Philippians commands us: Let each of us – you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Those on this wall have done that in the ultimate form. They abandoned their own comfort and security for the sake of our countrymen. They paid the price for freedom we enjoy today. And we are all indebted to them.

Today we want to honor in particular the individuals whose names we are adding to this wall of heroes.

Michael Andrew Cameron Jordan, known to his friends and family as Andy. He served the American people all over the world, most recently in Juba, South Sudan.

The second name is Selena Nelson-Salcedo, who most recently served as consular chief at the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Selena and Andy worked hard on behalf of all of us. They were patriotic and passionate about advancing the United States's interests abroad. They leave behind families, friends, and coworkers who will miss them greatly. But they also leave behind a great legacy of selfless service that will be a reminder to us all and to future generations forever. The names on this wall illustrate that we are living in uncertain, difficult times. Every morning, I'm grateful to be working with colleagues who are up to the challenge, willing to sacrifice so much, whether Foreign or Civil Service or locally employed staff, every day in support of our mission.

I promise I'm going to do everything I can to keep every single one of our team members safe. One of the things I did as the director of the CIA and will continue to do as Secretary is to visit posts abroad and see how our family members are living and working. I always stop and ask the question: Would I be comfortable placing my own family in this situation? That's the standard for evaluating how well we are doing for our people and how well we are doing in keeping them and their families safe. If the conditions aren't good enough for the Pompeo family, we will fix it. If the safety is inadequate, we will correct it. If there are shortcomings in security measures, we will get after them immediately. It's my job. The very first briefing I received after I was nominated was on the issue of security. I take this mission incredibly seriously.

So today, as we remember the fallen during this solemn occasion, we grieve for these heroes. We pray for their families and their friends and colleagues. But we must also keep our eyes fixed, knowing that a more stable and peaceful future is ahead because of the legacy they have helped us achieve. Every day, we get up with a goal in mind, remembering that the sacrifice we all make makes freedom possible, and we channel their dedication and their commitment to propel us forward. Thank you all. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I know I speak for all of us when I say how much we appreciate that you are with us today. I'd now like to ask Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Tom Shannon to come to the podium.

UNDER SECRETARY SHANNON: Thank you, Barbara. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I'm deeply honored to be here on this most meaningful of occasions. These plaques and those across our lobby chart the measure of devotion and sacrifice of American Foreign Service officers and civil servants across nearly 240 years. They hold the names and memories, as the Secretary noted, of 248 heroic Americans, but after today it will be 250, who have died while in the service

of our great republic. Of these, 112 have been added since the day I raised my hand and swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States in 1984. Each of these names, from William Palfrey, the very first in 1780, to those we will add today, has a compelling story. Each had a family and friends and colleagues who mourn their death.

This year, we mourn and honor two more members of our Foreign Service family. I want to share with you the stories of Michael Andrew Cameron Jordan and Selena Nelson-Salcedo, two outstanding examples of the very best of the Foreign Service. Michael Andrew Cameron Jordan, known to his family and friends as Andy, served as the information management officer at U.S. Mission in Juba, South Sudan. He died unexpectedly on December 18th, 2016. Andy joined the Foreign Service in 2003 and served with distinction in Baghdad, Brussels, Karachi, Tel Aviv, Lusaka, Tbilisi, and Nairobi.

Andy's humble nature meant he never boasted of his contributions or their impact, but they were significant. While in South Sudan, a country with an eroding infrastructure and a deteriorating security situation, Andy, through his ingenuity and talent, maintained an IT platform that enabled the embassy team to carry out its mission of feeding 2 million people per month and providing water and sanitation to 2,500 – 250,000 people living in UN camps, and much more. Andy would take no credit for himself for these accomplishments; rather, he would shower praise on his team. He was especially supportive of and beloved by the embassy's Foreign Service Nationals. He exhibited these traits of professional excellence and personal generosity in all of his assignments.

Andy's pride and joy was his family – his wife, Deb, and his two beautiful daughters, Madi and Helena. They are all here today. Andy loved his family dearly. He often wore t-shirts from Helena's regattas and would decorate his workspace with Madi's art. To Deb, to Madi, to Helena, you do us great honor through your presence here today, and you do us a great kindness by allowing us to share with you our grief at the loss of Andy. Our words can provide little comfort, but we hope our solidarity and respect can ease the ache and provide some solace.

Today we also honor Selena Nelson-Salcedo. Selena was the consular chief at the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava when she passed away on June 4th, 2017. Selena joined the department as a Foreign Service officer in 2008, after a brilliant academic career in her native Midwest. She earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and a master's degree from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. During her time in the State Department, she served in the Dominican Republic, Malaysia, and Slovakia. She spoke five languages fluently. She was passionate about civil rights and social justice, and spent much of her career working to improve the lives of the poor and disenfranchised around the world. She was a great soul.

Selena is survived by her husband Jorge, who is a valued member of our department. She also leaves her wonderful daughters Gaia, who will turn four years old tomorrow, and Antonella. Jorge, Gaia, and Antonella are joined here today by over a dozen members of their extended family. Thank you for being

with us today. Your courage and your generosity of spirit has provided us with great comfort. The thoughts and gratitude of every member of the Foreign Service family are with you today.

The Greek poet and dramatist Aeschylus wrote, "In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." That pain has etched the names of Andy and Selena into our hearts. It has also etched their names into stone, where they will serve both as an inspiration and an example of lives lived courageously in the service of the American people.

Mr. Secretary, Madam Ambassador, could you please unveil the names.

(The names were unveiled.)

Michael Andrew Cameron Jordan, Selena Nelson-Salcedo, we salute you. May God bless you. Yes, call forth the wreath, please.

AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON: Thank you, Tom, for being here, and thank you for your exemplary service to our nation. Will you all please stand as the United States Armed Forces Color Guard retires the colors.

(The Colors were retired.)

AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON: I would like to conclude today's ceremony by thanking you all for being here today and for honoring our colleagues and the Foreign Service community. Thank you all.

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