

TRANSCRIPT

"AFGHAN WOMEN: 2014 AND BEYOND"

A Conversation With Mary Akrami, Palwasha Hasan, Manizha Naderi, Lida Nadery, and Hasina Safi

Moderator: Eliza Griswold

Introduction: Sarah Han

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: SPEAKERS HAVE HEAVY ACCENTS.* * *

ANNOUNCER:

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SARAH HAN:

Welcome, everyone. Thank you so much for coming. I just wanted to quickly introduce our moderator, Eliza Griswold. And-- she will take on in-- introducing our distinguished panel. Eliza is an award-winning journalist, poet and author, and has reported extensively from Afghanistan.

She has published her work in a variety of publications, including *The New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Harper's-- Atlantic Monthly*, et cetera, et cetera. And next month, she will be publishing a book about and translations of Afghan folk poetry-- the-- which will be entitled, *I Am the Beggar of the World*.

And reporting for this book involved Eliza meeting with an extensive number of Afghan women and learning about the poetry and the culture, really, of-- of what it's like to be like-- a woman-- how-- what it's like to be a woman in Afghanistan. So we're very pleased that she could moderate this panel tonight. And I just hand it over to her now.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thanks, Sarah. So, it's really an honor to be here this evening and to be sitting at this table with this remarkable group of women. And we are gonna be hearing from them immediately. This group of women has been here-- in the United States for the past week to launch their strategic initiative: Women Visioning 2024.

Which is an effort to look in-- in a really intelligent and informative way at what the challenges of the women's movement are going to look like over the next decade in Afghanistan. So tonight our format is to just introduce everyone. And then each woman is gonna take on a substantive to-- topic that we really should be learning about here in this audience.

And then we'll open it up to questions a bit. And-- and that should really give us a sense of-- of what kind of work's going on on the ground in preparation for obviously this huge sea change happening this year. And-- and really how we can remain informed and remain connected to an area of the world where we certainly have-- a large role no matter what. So with that, we're just going to go from left to right. And Hasina, do you wanna-- do you wanna introduce yourself in two sentences?
(LAUGHTER)

HASINA SAFI:

Yes. Thank you very much, Eliza. I'm Hasina Safi, the executive director for Afghan Women Network, which is-- one of the most expedient. And one of the leading-- networks in Afghanistan. The only women network, which has more than 100 and-- 12-- civil society women focused organizations.

As well as more than 3,000 individual members who believe in one mission. And they plan and work together. We are in-- our-- in 34 provinces of Afghanistan through our members. Our programs are women political part-- our strategy is women political participation and leadership. You know, women social leg-- and legal protection. And-- women peace and security. And we do it through three strategies, which is awareness and advocacy-- networking and capacity building.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thank you. Lida?

LIDA NADERY:

Thank you. Hi. This is Lida Nadery. I'm the executive board member for Afghan Women's Network and also co-founder for Modern Education-- for Development. It's a local organization. We provide training on public speaking and also working on sexual harassment in Afghanistan.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thank you. Manizha?

MANIZHA NADERI:

My name is Manizha Naderi. I'm the executive director of Women for Afghan Women. And-- we have offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., and ten provinces in Afghanistan. We run Family Guidance Center, shelters, and other programs for women who have experienced human rights violations. So in-- in total we have-- 31-- centers across country.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thank you. Palwasha?

PALWASHA HASAN:

Hi. I'm Palwasha Hasan. I'm founding member of Afghan Women Network. But also a consultant at (UNINTEL PHRASE) development issues.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Mary?

MARY AKRAMI:

Good evening, everybody. I'm Mary Akrami, the executive director of Afghan Women-- Skills Development Center. One of the first woman organization that's established (UNINTEL PHRASE) in Afghanistan since 2002. And I'm also proud that I can say that I am one of (UNINTEL PHRASE) advocacy-- defenders in Afghanistan-- working for promoting and protecting woman (UNINTEL PHRASE) across the country.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Great. Okay, so we're just gonna start with Palwasha. And ask about what are the achievements made by women in the past decade?

PALWASHA HASAN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). Thank you. Good question. I think-- for last-- one decade-- there have been good partnership between international community and Afghan women in Afghanistan. But I think (UNINTEL PHRASE) a woman goes early on the stairs. Women has been struggling during the most difficult periods of Taliban.

And by running an underground schools and woman helping running their own projects and programs for other woman. Running school for children in-- (UNINTEL PHRASE). It was not much attention to woman situation in that time. But since 2001-- when Afghanistan is the focus of international support and development-- Afghan Women has been-- the one who has-- well benefitted from support.

And-- the-- there are-- many achievement-- we see at the institutional level. But also-- at the-- civil society-- level as well. You see-- Afghanistan has been able to bring woman in the political are-- arena in a large scale probably if we (UNINTEL PHRASE) in the region-- we are well ahead of many other countries. We have-- 28% (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- with-- woman seats.

And-- and that is quota-- in the-- lower house. And we have also in the upper house-- quite a big number of woman. And this is, like, a huge-- than ever Afghanistan had. And meanwhile-- if you look to the situation of-- girls-- going back to school and got education, I think in last few years there has been enormous changes in the number of girls.

Which includes a 38% of the total number of-- like-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) children going back to school. And this is-- a huge achievement, which wasn't possible if there was not support of international community in Afghanistan. But-- coming back to the woman, I think-- it-- it's the first time in Afghanistan that-- the changes has-- Afghanistan always had movement for women.

But that was, like, mostly elite movement. I think-- in last ten years the progress of the grassroot (UNINTEL PHRASE) and the woman in the middle class-- coming out and talking about woman's right issue. And transferring the whole notion of-- from service (COUGH) (UNINTEL PHRASE) to more-- issue which is, like, (UNINTEL PHRASE) woman-- in the national arena. But also internationally it has been growing-- bigger and bigger.

And it's not confined only to Kabul. We have a (UNINTEL PHRASE) of woman (UNINTEL PHRASE) all around the country. And I think this is, like, a huge difference if we compare it to ten years back. Here are-- couple of laws and-- policies, also, have developed in last few years.

Despite of all challenges, we can always look back and use that. For instance, we can-- seek a situation of (UNINTEL PHRASE) law-- which is that-- an indication of violence against woman law in Afghanistan. This is one of the important piece of document which has been developed by woman themselves.

And women-- make efforts over five years to draft this-- this document. And there has been a well-- coordination with-- woman in-- Ministry of Women Affair. Plus--

in the parliament at that time. We literally have challenges with that. I don't want to forecast on that-- now.

But I think that the way-- the evolution of the law has happened. And woman themselves drafted a law for themselves. I think the-- that is big. And-- also-- the way the law has been used on two of the panelists on two side of me. The way woman shelters-- has been using-- that-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) law-- for protecting the cases of woman who has been victim of violence is huge.

From last three years, it has been practical used. And at-- also at the national policy level and also-- coordination with-- international community. If you go back to that 2003-- agreement between Afghanistan and-- word-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) one of them into (UNINTEL PHRASE) benchmark-- to protect woman.

These are-- good achievement in the situation of woman. We also have-- a huge number of young woman who are graduating, going for study abroad. And also inside the country there are different initiatives both in private institution and-- public institution where-- many girls are going for higher education. But if we compared it to the situation because Afghanistan was-- a backward or-- I-- under-developed country-- we then-- for over 30 years of conflict.

Which is still continues, unfortunately. Most of the-- provinces of the country including Kabul, we are still-- s-- facing the challenges of the-- bombing every day. We-- we see-- there are many-- grief-- situation of the woman still exist. So it-- usually when you talk about achievement-- many people con-- can contest and say, "Oh, but still there are-- huge number lack your opportunity and children who are-- doesn't have access to school yet."

The same could be applied to the situation of woman. We on one hand have, like, huge number of woman-- (COUGH) violence against woman cases which appears in the media. And some of you-- you have been witnessing, like, woman-- are still victim of-- violence. Like cutting off your-- body part. And-- dismembering the-- their body-- part. And all-- even killing woman in this-- they are losing their life.

But I think for me the achievement is, like, today we have many-- also many organization who are working to address this issue. So the positive side of-- the things is important. And second, we have many organization what-- which are registering these violences. A few years back when you were planning on the situation of-- woman in Afghanistan, there was no baseline data-- to-- against which-- the improvement could be measured.

But today at least we have places where-- human right abuses or other situation of woman are give-- get-- registered. Or at least that give you-- a place where this could be compared to-- a few years-- later. I think-- my time is short. But I will be-- happy to chat with you and hear these question and answers.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

That's great. That's super helpful. So a sense of some of the victories. Hard won victories over the past decade. And some of what we've been able to see put in place in terms of the law. And also hard data, which is-- it's difficult to do anywhere. And to do in Afghanistan, that's a major victory. So now let's turn to Hasina and ask a little bit about what right now are we seeing as some of the major challenges for the women's movement?

HASINA SAFI:

Thank you very much. I think-- along with the achievements which we had in-- in the last-- 14 years-- the biggest challenge is the maintenance of-- of these gains and achievements. How can we maintain and how can we hold-- these-- achievements? And how can we-- hold it?

The biggest challenge today is-- especially being in the United States-- is the 50% cut off budget. It is-- people just talk about tran-- transition and about-- the international troops leaving. Okay, they will leave. But we do not think about the result and the impact that whose life will it impact?

And the first-- the first and the last person who is a lot-- impacted-- through this budget cut is the women and the children of Afghanistan. Because they are the people who-- who are the last to get a source or a-- or a resource. So the first big challenge is-- is the budget cut. And-- the recommendation would be that how-- how much we can advocate-- specifically for the women's-- programs in order to maintain all those-- achievements which we had.

The second thing is definitely the security. As our friend mentioned, that a lot of middle class-- women-- have-- been-- have been added. Or have been included in the-- women coalitions and networking. However, the big-- one of the other challenges is that it has been a small circuit. For example, in the last 14 years or in the last ten years, it must have been a collective number of women who fought for the refugee women in Pakistan.

But coming back to Afghanistan, those four-- number got to 40. And maybe 400. But how can we still do-- try to coordinate with them? How can we still-- because those who have started their struggle from the beginning, they have the-- the resource. Now, how can we connect the youth? How can we-- do this-- generation-- coordination so that the experience which they have, it should go to the next generation and they can maintain it-- for-- for-- in order to-- move along with the women movement.

The other-- challenges that the-- the women went to school. They did higher education. They are now graduated from universities. We have master's degrees. We have bachelor's degrees. But there is no employment. Still they are-- if you see still they are teachers. Still they are-- and now what are the o-- the-- the

recommendations for these challenges that there is a lot of technical capacity building-- programs required for them in order to sustain this school.

For example, there were scholarship. They went, they studied. Again, when they come to Afghanistan, there are not programs or positions for them so that they feel different. For example, if I was a teacher before that and I go and I do a master's or a bachelor's in, for example, United States or in London. While coming back, I would not want to be a teacher. I want to be-- I would like to be a leader. So what is the challenge? The challenge is that people are still considering me as the teacher.

So this is-- this is one of-- of-- of-- of the biggest-- challenges which we have. And the other thing is-- through the experience which we have found this, that growing conservatism in Afghanistan. The opportunity which was given to the women of Afghanistan in the last decade definitely-- the world gave it.

But the people of Afghanistan, the men in Afghanistan, they did not think that women will go this far. They were-- would-- did not know that they were that-- like, the capacity was there. Which is now becoming a challenge because they are replacing the people. So this is why they are trying to legislatively isolate them. For example, the experiences you saw in the-- elimination of violence against women, which was a law which was drafted, which was-- developed by the Civil Society Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Justice and this and that.

But now how to isolate? Because still if we do not have the law in place, that is a failure. One of the very (UNINTEL PHRASE) success indicators which the women of Afghanistan had with-- was the Evola (PH). And the same thing with the stoning issue. The same thing with the criminal procedure code.

So this is-- this conservatism before if it was unaware people, now it is maybe aware people. So slowly and slowly, because if something comes in the policy level on that time we cannot see that it is an unaware issue. It is a-- like, it's a proposed thing. And the other thing is still within-- within the-- as I stated before, with the three or two generations there is a lot trust building and confidence building required.

Within the women in the grassroots. Within the women in the provincial level. And within the women in the capital levels. There is still a gap. Because they-- they are, for example, the Civil Society Organization, there are organizations, there are groups, there are coalitions.

However, the biggest challenges that we have to make it one voice. Because still if we have two, three, four-- four-- five officers sitting here, we have five different messages. So people will get confused. So this is one of the biggest challenge that we have to really coordinate ourselves.

And we have to really have one voice in order to see-- to see the-- the result in the lives of-- of women. And-- one of the other issues which-- which I will-- I would like to-- mention here is. And that is-- the most important issue is security. I think most of these-- challenges which I still mentioned in here, they all depend upon security.

If the security is not good, the mobility of women are-- impossible. If the security up

is not good, the access to education, the access to health, the access to-- to, for example, networking-- all of-- these-- issues are biggest challenges. So these are the-- the-- some of the areas which we really-- need-- need to-- to think.

And some of us would-- would come definitely when our friends would talk about. And one of the other issues is that-- the-- the-- the safety of the women themselves. So they are in different categories. Maybe the women in the very high profile level, maybe the women in the provincial level, maybe the women in the grassroots level. So these are the challenges which-- which are still-- remaining. And-- definitely we will come back in the details when there are question, answers. I will not talk more. (LAUGHTER) I will (UNINTEL PHRASE) my 30 seconds. (LAUGH)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay. That-- that's super helpful. Thank you, Hasina. So, just talking about what are some of the challenges, the lack of a unified voice. Security, overwhelmingly because that's really what lets people move around-- and speak to each other.

HASINA SAFI:

Yeah.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

And this growing conservatism that seems to be a backlash of sorts against the gains that women have made. Okay, so--

HASINA SAFI:

And the budget is the most--

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

And the budget.

HASINA SAFI:

--practical. (LAUGHTER)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

And the 50% cut in the budget. Yeah, absolutely. Okay. So, Lida, will you tell us a little bit about what you're seeing with the role of women in the upcoming elections?

LIDA NADERY:

Yeah. Afghanistan is practicing democracy-- for the third time in the country. To talk about-- a little about how the environment looks like in Afghanistan, then I will talk a little about how the situation of women is in the country-- on-- in-- for the election. And-- for upcoming election in both in provincial and presidential election.

The environmental-- environment of Afghanistan at the moment looks so beautiful. Why? First, because everybody's talking about the election. That's our last hope because it's a very, very important moment for us in Afghanistan. So everybody hopes that this election will be good, transparent and-- and a proper transition of the power.

Secondly, youth is very excited about this. They're every day talking in the social media and in school, everywhere that the election is coming. Elect-- how election goes. And they are watching TV, radio-- debates of presidential candidate. And then they reflect back in social media how was the talk? What was the plan of each presidential candidate?

When you go outside of your home, you see a lot of banners, billboards, which gives you-- a hope that there is a lot of presidential candidate. They are putting their own photos with a good message. So you can see that how campaign of this president-- this presidential election became more-- more (UNINTEL PHRASE) that. More-- better than two-- other election that we had. Also, you can see that the-- after this-- it is the third election and the among themselves lead the overall-- all the election.

The oversight, the monitoring, everything is done by the Afghan (UNINTEL PHRASE). So the administration-- to process everything. So the environment is like you are feeling when you are in Afghanistan both in Kabul and in-- in the provinces.

Now coming that ha-- what played very important role in that. The first thing is the media played extremely important role, both TV and radio and-- print media. Because you can see a lot of newspapers every day-- every day you are-- putting a lot information about the election to provide much more information about.

The election commission itself this time worked very well. Because they have made a packages of information both for presidential candidate and provincial candidate to make sure that they are receiving information, they are well aware of the process, they are aware of what's going on in the country. And also really putting a lot of advertisement and information into the-- media that people should be aware of. The election and really encourage them to go and vote.

So-- these are very impor-- the things that, I mean, really-- attract everybody-- in this old process. Now coming to the women, how women are feeling about the election.

And how these provincial or presidential candidate-- how many is-- are-- are-- are-- women. In the past two election, women's right activist-- or several society organization had to force some of the female from the provinces to go and be candidates themselves.

But this-- year, this effort, this election, we have 308 provincial candidate of women. And they are coming-- they are going around the-- in the provinces, in the district. They are talking about this iss-- issue of election. They are asking for the vote.

And that's a very, very positive sign that you can see in this election. Erickson survey of one of the local organization which is called (UNINTEL PHRASE) and free election-- affairs should that when they were asking question, 70-- more than 75% of man said women should go and vote.

That's a very positive thing because, as our colleague said before, and even now it's very difficult to go-- to think that women's-- should vote or a woman voice could be heard ten years back. But today, even man believe-- men believe that they have to go and vote.

That's-- that's in favor of women. We can see in the presidential debates that the presidents candidate have a plan for women's empowerment in their-- future-- plan. So that-- that is also very positive aspect. You can see even in the billboard or-- in their-- that they say that we will provide equal opportunity for the women. We will give women a very important-- position in our government.

They are coming and talking to the Afghan Women's Network, to other-- women-- agencies. And they are saying that how w-- w-- role-- women's role is important for-- their future-- terms. So that's very important for us, too. Coming to the police. Police said that they will-- provide 93-- persons of the security around the country.

Other-- it-- it-- still it's very difficult for us to know that how they will maintain this security on the election day. So I would not talk so much about our everyday election day. But I will say that-- a few small challenges at the end. And that is that-- first is, as our colleague said a growing conservatism. Mulai (PH) is already passing the eight messages in the mosque about the provincial candidates and it's not good.

The third is the transparency of the election. The-- fourth is because we want more observer from international community to make sure-- on the election day to make sure that the election goes-- transparent. And better and good. That-- Afghanistan should have a very good transition period after the election. Thank you.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Great. Okay, that was very helpful. So really I think the most frightening thing, though, is that what you said at first. Is the election is our last hope. So-- okay. So now we're gonna turn to Mary and talk a little bit about the role of women in the peace process.

MARY AKRAMI:

Thank you so much. I hope that my voice not getting tired (LAUGH) after talking of the (UNINTEL PHRASE) of my friend. I wanted to just go through the history of Afghanistan that how go on (UNINTEL PHRASE) role historically before the war, before the conflict was ex-- exist in Afghanistan. (UNINTEL PHRASE) woman of Afghanistan was really a great role-- and peaceful thing.

And so when the biggest conflicts among the communities around the ethnic groups. But unfortunately now we see that due to-- prolonged-- conflicts and as negative impacts on other (UNINTEL PHRASE) that we have lost do-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) cultures that now go on-- that try-- that people try the conservatism is in grow-- growing.

And they try to exclude woman from all the process. But now we see that during the last ten years-- as my friends talks about the-- positive progresses, which is-- one of-- as-- that a woman's-- (UNINTEL) and peace process. The last-- experience which we have in regard to women and peace that we had a resurgent. Woman could play a great role in peace process in Afghanistan. But unfortunately that time it was 2005, no one would show an interest.

But woman as-- play a great role. And we have-- have the good examples of-- their role. Especially in the-- domestic violence-- and solving the domestic violence problems, which is one of the very critical and v-- one of-- one a-- major problems in Afghanistan.

That is-- like-- domestic violence a family issue. No one could interfere to the family issue except woman. And women-- had-- a great role. And we have experience of working and establishing peace (UNINTEL PHRASE) that-- woman-- would play-- their roles and solve, like, so many-- problems.

And so many-- women issue by their support. But unfortunately, as in Afghanistan, there is no political well. And there is no-- that much interest in women's issue because women's issue is a political issue. And they were trying to exclude.

The-- the-- the positive of progress is that now we see that we have-- that our peace-- our peace concerts. We call it the peace shora (PH). That now we have, like-- a nine women-- they are part of that-- shora. And-- we see that the challenges and difficulties what-- what those woman have inside the-- the concerts.

And because it is-- not-- because mostly the members of the concert are all-- very conservative. And they're all-- we can say, like-- were not-- to be with them. Closely working with them it's not easy. The woman of Afghanistan, especially those women, they didn't need-- support. Like, to be behind them.

As the-- and-- generally talk about woman issue because the progresses which has made that we see, that gets us all behind it. (UNINTEL PHRASE) in my experience I can see even that behind of-- involvement of government of Afghanistan. That is woman of Afghanistan that improve, like, they could do.

But you must invest on women of Afghanistan. During the last ten years, it's now proved that woman could play a great role at different levels. If we have-- and based on women's-- education, on-- civ-- civic education, health, or whatever, women-- proved that they could bring positive changes in the society. Positive changes in the community and-- and development.

As the-- now we-- see that-- a woman-- especially now that-- this-- this-- the time is very, very crucial in Afghanistan that we are all talking about the transition. It is a very, very-- challenging time for-- journey for all Afghans, especially for woman of Afghanistan-- woman of Afghanistan really need support and really need-- them to-- we should know that who is behind us as a woman organization. As the one that we are at the front line.

We are putting our life in danger to support them. Or establishing peace shora, like, we have 50% woman and fif-- 50% men. It's not possible at all. And people always say that how is it possible in-- afghan concert to have woman and men? No, it's impossible.

But who is invest-- who is give time? Who is give-- like, support to that? Because-- peace process, not in Afghanistan. Across the-- the world, it's a long, long-- term procedure. It needs long support. It needs long-- long term commitment.

But in Afghanistan especially, everything is-- project-wise, like-- it-- they are just thinkin', like, for one here, two-- two years. Like, for some programs which is really-- instead of supporting that-- instead of we-- solve the problems we most create other problems. And that we are-- that we really need, like, Afghanistan and woman of Afghanistan needs sort of sort of dedicated unity for woman movement.

Because the-- the way that we are-- putting ourselves or the way that releasing our wives in a-- such a-- such a-- society, which is a step, there is no political way. And-- we proved. But we really want the international community to look at man's Woman of Afghanistan to be behind Woman of Afghanistan. And this time they should trust on Woman of Afghanistan because for me, as one-- as the little experience I have, I know that the woman movement that is a good-- woman issue is a political issue.

And woman who movement across the world, it needs unity and solidarity. But unfortunately, Afghanistan, we must push. That's okay. We are pushing because we need. And that-- for that reason we didn't need long term commitment. We didn't need long term support. And we didn't need, like, that we should realize.

And there is someone behind us. And how we could-- follow. And how we could proceed-- proceed our work. In that regard-- I (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- my f-- work as-- as-- as a woman organization that we are providing shelter for woman (UNINTEL PHRASE).

I didn't touch on what we are doing practically in the community, what we have done-- world-- with religious leaders, politically. I will leave the floor to friends that they have the (UNINTEL PHRASE) because my time is over. And (LAUGH) I leave the floor to my friends. And thank you so much for listening and hearing us.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Great. Thank you. So we will come back to that question of practically what you've done on the ground in working with religious leaders. That-- absolutely. Okay. So now, having heard a little bit about what's before us-- Manizha, maybe you could tell us a little bit about what-- what can we do? What can the international community do to-- to support you guys? What's useful? And-- and what is not useful, also?

MANIZHA NADERI:

So, before I go into that, I just wanna cla-- clarify with-- a few things that-- the panelists have said. Hasina was talking about the criminal procedures code. The criminal procedures code happened less than a month ago. The-- the act in parliament was-- revising the criminal procedures code.

They've been working on it for six years. And-- at the last minute, they added an article that said that-- victims of domestic violence couldn't testify against their perpetrators. So family members weren't allowed to testify against the perpetrator. Any family members.

You know, a brother, a husband, a father, anyone who was a witness in that family couldn't testify against the perpetrator. Police weren't al-- allowed to question-- family members of the accused. And the doctors who-- examined the-- the victim of domestic violence weren't allowed to come to court to testify. You know, that (LAUGH)-- basically would've made all of our work very impossible.

You know, we work on-- on a daily basis-- Mary and-- Women for Afghanistan Woman, we run-- shelters across the country. And all of our work is based on, you know, getting the-- the-- these cases to court and-- and prosecuting-- men who have raped, you know, killed.

And-- if-- if this-- criminal procedures code had passed, we-- we couldn't have done our work. So the-- the-- the procedures code passed both houses of parliament, quietly. And then it-- it was sent to President Karzai's-- desk for his signature. You know, the Afghanistan Women's M--- Movement is-- is not what-- what it used to be. It's a very strong mo-- movement as far as-- I'm concerned because we all stuck together. We put pressure on the government. On-- in different ways-- through the media and-- and other advocacy-- avenues.

And President Karzai, because of all the pressure-- international pressure and-- and local pressure, he sent the-- criminal procedures code back to the Ministry of Justice so it could be re-- revised. So that was a solid victory for-- fort the women in Afghanistan. And, you know-- doing this work is not easy. We-- we-- we have our work cut out for us.

We not only have to-- fight fundamentalists on the ground. You know, men and women fundamentalists. But we also have to fight the government ev-- every step of the way. You know, they're-- they're-- they're passing these laws against women.

And-- the Minister of Justice-- a year and a half ago went to (UNINTEL) parliament and-- and-- and called shelters brothels, you know. A form of-- (LAUGH) people in Afghanistan (UNINTEL) the government and other people think of shelters as-- as brothels because, you know, they think-- it's a house full of women. What-- what else could they-- they be doing, right?

So we have to fight that on-- on a daily basis. It's-- it's-- it's very challenging work. And we need-- support from all of you. From everyone in the-- in the-- in the world as m-- m-- I like what-- a thing that m-- Mary when-- when you said, you know, the woman's movement is a global movement. It is. And we can't let go of that.

I-- today I called for-- a coalition of not just afghan women. But women-- across all of the world to stand together to make sure that what was happening during the Taliban does not happen again. There's a risk that that-- that everything could turn back pre-2011. And I'm sure you're all-- you're all-- watching the TV, you know, pr-- pr-- prior to 9/11.

Seeing the Taliban stoning women, killing women on the streets, on TV. That could still happen again. And the United States has-- has a-- has responsibility to not-- not just-- just the wom-- woman but the whole country that, you know, that we don't go back to what-- what-- Afghanistan used to be.

Thousands of U.S. troops have died in Afghanistan. Billions of dollars have been sent-- spent in Afghanistan. Those things cannot go in vain. You know, that's not an option. We're not gonna sit quietly. You know, the-- the-- (UNINTEL)-- we're-- we're not gonna-- go there.

The Bilateral were-- Bilateral Security Agreement has to be signed. And we're all for it. We all, in fact, advocate for it. Without the U.S. troops in Afghanistan, everything will go back. And I know that U.S. troops can't stay in Afghanistan forever.

But the-- the transition has to be in a gradual way so that, you know-- we have a 350,000 member strong Afghan army. And they're learning. They're-- it's a very young army. It's only ten years old. They're doing a great job. But we-- they need time and they need support from the-- international community.

So the gradual really has to happen in a very-- gradual-- you know, the transition has to happen in a gradual, slow way. If the troops come out overnight in-- in-- in a few months, everything's gonna go back. Civil war's gonna start in Afghanistan all over again.

Everything that has been achieved in Afghanistan, all the gains that have been made in Afghanistan will be in vain. And that's not-- I don't think that's something that you want. I want. Nobody wants that. So we-- we really have to stick together and make sure that that doesn't happen.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Great. Great. (APPLAUSE) Thank you. Great. Okay, so now we have some time for

questions. And I will ask just a few to get us started. And then start thinking out there, because everyone's gonna have the chance to ask some questions. And-- and whoever would like to answer them, I really would like to open it up.

And just-- s-- sticking on this point that Manizha was bringing up, because I think this is probably the most confusing for us here. The idea of American boots on the ground. And what are the positive aspects and what are the challenges? I-- I'll tell you what surprised me.

Maybe you guys could speak to this a little bit. I had thought-- talking to women last year-- in Kabul and outside of Kabul that really people would be fatigued. Let's-- come on, Americans, you-- it's time for you guys to go home. And one of the collateral pieces of the American presence, and this really gets to what you were saying, Hasina, is the drying up of international aid dollars.

Because those-- that money not-- that money allowed women jobs that were a way to get outta the house. So that by the money going away, the job goes away and so, too, do the freedoms that go along with having the job. So all of these are complicated issues.

But maybe we could address what are-- the-- the draw-down of American forces. What are some of the positive pieces of that? And what are some of the-- the challenges that Manizha was just speaking to? Yeah? Do you wanna start? Did you feel like you had a chance to finish? (LAUGHTER)

MANIZHA NADERI:

I did finish. But-- you know-- you-- you-- the U-- U.S. troops and-- the United States government has made mistakes in Afghanistan. You know, that's-- that-- we all know this. The m-- mistakes of the U.S. government, you know, in terms of foreign policy has made Afghan-- Afghanistan or Afghan people shouldn't pay for-- for it.

And Karzai, who's refusing to sign this Bilateral Security Agreement, he does not represent the Afghan people right now. (LAUGH) A few mo-- when the-- a few months ago, he-- he had the Loya Jirga of 3,000 people who came from all over the country. So he wanted to-- to get advice from this lo-- the Jirga-- to-- to basically tell him, should he sign this Bilateral Security Tegree-- Agreement or not?

At the Loya Jirga, he invited-- family members whose sons were killed by American bombings. And I think he-- I-- in his mind I think he wanted to bring some-- friction into this-- mix. He thought that maybe the family mem-- members would say, "Don't sign this. You know, the Americans are all bad."

But those family members that signed this Bilaterco-- Bilateral Security Agreement because without American troops to help Afghanistan, everything's gonna go bad-- bad. And even those people who, you know, whose sons were killed don't want American troops to really leave.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). Does anyone else also want to--

HASINA SAFI:

I-- I just would add a little that-- some of us were like me, Mary, we were in the Jirga which was called. And we were really worried about what will happen because the first thing which happens, we are-- our first priority, like the women.

We were worried about the Constitution, that some articles might come out that people would say to change the Constitution. And again, within the Constitution, the first thing which worries us are those sensitive articles which gives us opportunity within the nation-- development programs.

However, like the Jirga started and within-- in the first day of the Jirga, like the first half of the first day's usually introduction and knowing each other. So while we were, like, I was in the aid committee while we were talking. So suddenly one of the very-- very influential elders of-- one I-- one of the tribal leaders, he came with-- with a paper written.

He had written it that I'm formally resigning from the Jirga because I am not-- for the B.S.A. And the minute I saw his face, like, I was shivering inside. But didn't want to show what's happening because I thought once he said something, so everyone will, like, show by the action that what will we do? He said that, "This is my resignation from the Jirga. And I'm resigning for this non-- from this nonsense Jirga." And this and that.

And then all-- all of a sudden I saw that no one is showing a reaction. It was, oh, he's just mad. And I was so surprised because-- as-- Manizha said, they are-- they were all the people who were, like, from the provinces. And we in the civil society thought (UNINTEL PHRASE).

We thought that all of her-- them will say that we should not sign the B.S.A. So when-- when he was signing they were, like, when he came and (UNINTEL PHRASE). Okay, okay, take the paper. Take his resignations, put it aside. We will read it and then-- that why is he resigning?

So this really shows that-- that-- we really want to be a stable country. And in order to be a stable country, what are the things which we need to say? There is a saying I might-- that we still don't know how to fish. So we really need to know. Like, there has been-- good developments within the security sector of Afghanistan the way they were treating people before. The way, like-- especially in the media you must have experienced it that the way they took the-- the lead in some of the operations.

They really showed courage. And they really showed that they want to fight for their country. So what they need is, for example, they are maybe-- they were-- they are-- they are a kind, like, a kid now. But they really want to be a proper and-- and adult. So it will need time.

The way of the people, the United Nations people, we really understand the tax pay-- payers of United States. That it is sensitive. But you should not consider what the people of Afghanistan want with the politicians. Because politicians are always politicians. They have their agendas. Look at what improvements have come in the lives of people. The first thing which I would think is the employment. If, for example, suddenly so many people are unemployed.

So what will happen? There will be no food. Whatever they will have, they will sell all-- all of that and they will emigrate either to Europe. Either to United States. So-- so what-- where will it come? It will definitely the-- it will be a double burden.

And also it will not be very clear. Because it will create another problem in another place. So these are all the alternative bad options b-- bad options which we have. And some of the things, like, people in Afghanistan also know now that they can do it only if the world and the international community is patient with them.

There has been more than 30 decades-- four decades of war in Afghanistan. I will break this glass. I will put it here. It will break into pieces. Now, who can guarantee I will break it, for example, in one minute. But in 100 minutes I will not make it again.

So the same thing. It's a nation. It's a big nation with so many conflicts. With so many issues. We are not saying that be with us all the time. But what we say is, be patient and strategic. Be measurable. See what things have worked. And we really know consult of that. Consult women when there are women programs. Consult-- tribal-- tribals when there are tribal issues. So consult the relevant stakeholders.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thanks, Hasina. (APPLAUSE) Certainly an issue that-- that we hear a lot about here and would love to hear what you guys are thinking is the idea of the United States negotiating with the Taliban. And what group of Afghans could that affect more than women? It's--

MANIZHA NADERI:

Women. (LAUGHTER)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Yeah. Right.

MANIZHA NADERI:

Non-citizen women.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

So Palwasha, do you wanna speak to that? Or--

PALWASHA HASAN:

Sure. I think-- you know, Afghan Women Network, we-- we have raised this-- issue a long time ago. That-- whatever peace-- agreement when (UNINTEL PHRASE) but it (UNINTEL PHRASE) woman to participate in that. We have our own achievement for the lobby that-- has been organized by the group.

And-- there are p-- some changes in thinking of the politician in Afghanistan-- for agreeing-- to understand that-- conflict in Afghanistan has impacted woman more than anybody else. And for that reason, it's the first time that-- High Peace Council giving at least space to nine woman in its structure. Which is the highest-- committee.

But we also understand-- I will go back to-- what Mary has given example. Like, woman always had rule in traditional Afghanistan society for conflict resolution. Despite of the negative image of the Afghan culture or-- practicing of the negative tradition, there are also positive side of the culture which is promoting women who in their conflict resolution and peace building. And what we are other.

But also at the political level, I think-- woman has grown to a level-- that they can-- understand what is naturally good for the country. What is not good for-- them. Therefore-- we have always advocated that women should be on the peace table.

Unfortunately-- at the highest level we know there haven't been a formal negotiation with Taliban. But initiatives which has taken in-- Duhan (PH)-- Katar (PH)-- these places or some of the international meeting which has been organized by international community has always excluded woman. And especially woman from civil society-- to ask them what is your your view? And how we are perceiving-- political negotiation or-- what do we demand-- to be there on the table?

I think no-- nobody else can represent woman better than woman themselves. And-- we-- we are advocating for that. If United States or any other country is involved in the-- peace building process-- it should be-- woman of Afghanistan who also-- be considered-- in any agreement or-- to participate in the negotiation (UNINTEL PHRASE).

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Very diplomatic.

(MANIZHA NADERI: UNINTEL)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Yeah, Manizha. And anybody-- body wants to ask questions, please start lining up. Yeah.

MANIZHA NADERI:

So I-- I don't--

(MALE VOICE: UNINTEL)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

One minute so she can (UNINTEL PHRASE).

MANIZHA NADERI:

I-- I-- I don't-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) support negotiations with the Talib-- Taliban at all-- at all for a few reasons. First, they can't be trusted. You know, a few years ago-- b-- above everything else, who are the Taliban? It-- are-- they're supported by neighboring countries.

We don't know who they are. They're foreigners trying to create hav-- havoc in Afghanistan. And they can't be trusted. A few years ago the Pakistani government negotiated with the Taliban. And as soon as they signed the-- the-- the-- the signature line where the said, okay, they're gonna-- oh-- you know, ob-- respect the Pakistan constitution, the next day they started bur-- burning down schools, killing school children.

You know, they can't be trusted. And, you know, they're-- they're-- they're-- killer. Just this-- this morning there was a suicide bomber in Faria (PH) that-- that killed 17 people join 25 people-- other people are injured. Why are-- why should we negotiate with these people who are killing citizens? Innocent civilians on a daily basis.

You know, negotiating with them is just a band aid. You know, put a band aid and hope for the-- for the best. That's not gonna work. We really have to work at root causes. Who are these people? What for, you know. They're not from the community and-- let me tell you that.

You know, peop-- people don't support the Taliban. They're scared of them. That's why maybe they support 'em but they-- deep down they really don't support them. And-- you know-- negotiating with the Taliban is-- is-- is like telling the Jews to go-- go negotiate with-- with the Nazis. You know, was that (UNINTEL PHRASE) answer? No.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay. Different answer there. (LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

(UNINTEL PHRASE). Thank you. I have couple of statistical questions. Rate of births now. How many average woman has children? During Soviet time I remember it was five, six. How many now? Second question, average age of woman in time of marriage? Again, in Soviet time it was 18. What is now?

Percentage. How many of them under 14 years old during the time of marriage? (UNINTEL PHRASE) you certainly just said despite (UNINTEL PHRASE) condition. And my question is, is Western type of woman is role model for you? With your way of life, with your family condition. (UNINTEL PHRASE) speakin'. Would you like to be like Western woman? (BACKGROUND VOICE) (LAUGHTER)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Mary, do you wanna take that? Who-- who would like to answer? (UNINTEL PHRASE) (LAUGHTER) (BACKGROUND VOICE)

MARY AKRAMI:

Yes. I will want to start from the last questions. For us that we want to be as a woman-- we need-- we have our own cultures as we have before discussed that we-- our culture also has positive values and negative values. We want to-- to-- fight for the rights of-- of women.

Fight for the rights of-- their human rights. Which is violated now. Which is very-- like-- we see the challenge and problems that woman are facing. As I mentioned before, due to what-- to the negative impact of war. And to go into your second questions, the age of marriages according to-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) women's now-- now it is between 16 and 18.

In rural-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) unfortunately (UNINTEL PHRASE) is not secure. There is no security and still there is, like, we are witness of ten marriage. We are witness of different-- problems and challenges. But-- I could give a great examples of one of the very positive, like, it was never was happening in-- history of Afghanistan.

Like-- victory as before. Like, a woman was raped by-- an-- local police. The-- the families, the communities, they-- stand for supporting their daughters. And they were-- they still they are supporting their daughters. Because they-- they come to media. They talk. It is there (UNINTEL PHRASE).

And they-- want to support their daughter. They want to (UNINTEL) and take their

dignity back. That is-- never had happened or we had, as I said before, the positive value of the (UNINTEL) has positive. But the woman has a great-- value in our culture. I forgot the-- the first questions. (LAUGH) Give me my first but go for the-- (MALE VOICE: UNINTEL)

MARY AKRAMI:

Yes, my friend will go to that question.

PALWASHA HASAN:

I like to-- speak about the Russian time.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Oh. (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

PALWASHA HASAN:

First of all-- you know, legally or formally-- the marriage age is-- 16, not 12 or 13 or even-- we-- at worst-- even have worst cases like less than nine years sometime get married. Unfortunately, the situation was same in Russian time.

And now because in a lot of part of the country we don't have rule of law. This is one thing. And-- in Russian time, legally it was 18 but it doesn't mean it was-- applied everywhere in the country. That was issue. There have been good policies in Russian time. But unfortunately because of the (UNINTEL PHRASE) of Russian and-- the (UNINTEL) regime, with that changes and positive-- progress there was all these backlashes.

I-- I remember those days. I-- I come from the rural Afghanistan and I remember from my village when they wanted to open a school there for girls people were so much resisting that opening of school. And-- but today same people, even those (UNINTEL PHRASE) who went to war for several years are asking themselves that I want education for my girl.

I remember one of the guy who was telling me, "Do you think my girl-- my daughter doesn't deserve school? Going to school? And you deserve-- being educated?" So now you're questioning-- the-- our status and are they-- they-- they want that change. And this is kind of like one of together biggest positive break-out-- and changes that I personally. And most of my friends will agree me.

If not on the peace negotiation. (LAUGHTER) On-- on education part. That this is a-

- this is a big, big-- big truth. And-- the opening for-- girls education in the country. On the peace side, I would say I would-- I would have wished that we had better alternative-- than fighting and killing forever.

That I-- would say and no peace-- with Taliban or whoever. Most of the big-- arguments and the wars are happening after so much brutality. Look at the Syrian. Look at in Northern Ireland. And-- and wherever. N-- nobody-- there's better things than killing. Unfortunately, in war and conflict.

And I think nobody's as much tired of war and conflict as woman of this country. But it doesn't mean we are forgiving everything. There should be justice. There should be justice for all the brutality and killing which happened during Taliban time but before that. Even now it is committed.

I think-- during Russian time a lot of people-- have been killed in Afghanistan. There have been mass (UNINTEL PHRASE). And it's-- because nobody's raising their voice, it doesn't mean, like, people has forgotten that. But I think we are still-- facing a lot of-- bad situation right now. We are dealing with impunity everywhere. And-- thinking and going back to the history is little bit still-- maybe not realistic.

I think-- dealing with the past-- brutality, crimes and everything, it's important for every nation not to take-- revenge. But-- to-- to make justice-- for those who has been lost. And looking forward. And Afghanistan nation is very much looking forward nation. I've seen-- people are working together from different-- area of the conflict together. Today, those people who work in (UNINTEL PHRASE) time.

And we just (UNINTEL PHRASE) they are sitting around one table. They are making political alliances. And that is another part of the achievement that I should have mentioned (LAUGH) before. And this is not-- and woman are-- could not be divorced.

We are-- we are-- happily-- they're having different opinion and sitting together (LAUGHTER) and working on a lot of issue together. Although and not in her project but I think on woman protection and woman defending on-- shelter law. I think nobody work as much close with her organization as we did.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thank you.

MANIZHA NADERI:

00:58:59:00 I just wanna say-- (APPLAUSE)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Beautiful. (UNINTEL PHRASE). All right.

(OVERTALK)

MANIZHA NADERI:

I know-- I know that-- it's our job. You know, women's rights, but I really don't like this term women's rights. There's no difference between woman's rights or man's rights. It's all human rights. And we all want 'em. The-- the only thing that-- you know, we all want is peace, security, and to be safe. And-- and provide for our families. I don't wanna differentiate between a woman's rights and man's rights. It's all human right. (LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I-- I-- just-- on-- last comment you made about the communism-- just under the Soviet occupation, not one school was closed, by the way. And all the women could still go to school. I-- I wanna ask a question that-- I'm-- I'm sure if I were in Iran or Afghanistan I would be digging my own grave with this.

But don't you think a fundamental problem is the practicing of sharia law in the Muslim countries that doesn't allow any rights for women. And no matter how much money flows into these countries, that the United States or European or whatever, they absolutely have no rights according to sharia law.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Thank you for that.

MANIZHA NADERI:

I--

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

One second. We're gonna let--
(OVERTALK)

LIDA NADERY:

Well, now I would-- no, I agree with that.
(OVERTALK)

LIDA NADERY:

Okay. I admit I agree with that, though. We have-- a right in sharia. But the problem is knowledge-- that we don't have even the the (UNINTEL PHRASE) right activists sitting in this room-- we do not have enough-- information or knowledge about the sharia law.

That's why Afghanistan Women's Network has taken an initiative to really educate or equip ourselves with the knowledge of sharia law to really stand in front of those religious leader and tell them with the same language that they are talking to us.

It's more like a-- cultural barrier because people have been brought up in a culture that they always mix up-- sharia law with the relig-- with the-- religion-- culture with the religion. So that's why it's always we are practicing in actual-- the culture.

So that's why that's the-- one of the solution that we have found. And we are starting-- to-- first of all provide more information or awareness or knowledge on the sh-- Islamic education today-- of (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- women's activists and we reach out today-- provincial-- location. To find out more women who are-- talking about the human rights, woman's rights. Then we will educate them and equip them with that knowledge. So--

MARY AKRAMI:

I wanted to add one thing.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Sure.

MARY AKRAMI:

I just wanted to add one thing. And to go to sharia law. And Afghanistan is an Islamist country and we cannot ignore that. But the problem is that how to attract with the religious-- how to-- equip ourselves with the religious-- like, with the-- experience of-- knowledge of-- a religious.

I've just give the example of-- last week before I come here, we were at the (UNINTEL PHRASE) conference of-- which-- which was more than 200 religious leaders across the country. The conference was talk about that-- assessments of sexual violence against women in Afghanistan through Islamic persp-- perspective.

The-- the-- the topic was very, very interesting. And we come under a lot of questions. But we shouldn't lose our courage. We should talk with them. We should fight and we should work with them. If we had (UNINTEL PHRASE) what was unfortunately during the last ten years or during the last (UNINTEL PHRASE), theirs

was ignore and the other side they were equipped.

They were supported. And they would create so many problems. This is the time that now we as a nation we as-- humans we must to-- have access to our rights. And we must to fight for our rights. And we must to work with them. And the-- experience of the last weeks, the conference, I was in the (UNINTEL PHRASE). I was never at (UNINTEL PHRASE) charter (UNINTEL PHRASE). I really don't want the Westerns-- what-- what the-- woman of Western countries wants. I really want to, like-- to be as a human and respect as a humans, as a woman what my culture wants. And the same that all woman of Afghanistan wants the same. And we shouldn't ignore that. And that's why that this-- this is a challenge for us. And we must to equip ourselves and to fight for that. (APPLAUSE)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Mary, you were talking a little bit about we didn't get the chance. And I wonder if this conference is part of it. The practical way in which women have begun to approach religious leaders to build peace. Is thi-- is this conference one of those?

MARY AKRAMI:

We have used different approach with support of relatives. 2008 I was arrested by attorney generals when I was defending a case. And due to the relationship which was made since long time with Minister of Religious Affairs and we were-- encourage them or work with them to promote woman's human rights to a (UNINTEL PHRASE) perspective. We just built a relationship that was Minister of Religious Affairs interfere that he was-- released me from jail. That is-- that is the practical--

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Wait, why-- why were you were arrested?

MARY AKRAMI:

I was arrested because the attorney general wanted to-- there was a woman and there was a case that her husband was supported by-- supported by attorney's office. And then he-- he was trying to--

(OVERTALK)

MARY AKRAMI:

--put his wife in jail. And we were protecting her.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay.

MARY AKRAMI:

And support. And she got her divorce. It takes times but we got success to support her. But attorney's office, especially that (UNINTEL PHRASE) that he really was mad on me. And said that, "Who the hell is this women would come and support this woman?" Because in-- in Afghanistan usually the woman must to use different tools to solve their cases.

But now-- due to the exist of shelters, with the exist of woman organization, or the exist of Ministry of Woman Affairs or Human Rights Commission, woman could easily access to (UNINTEL PHRASE) in away. And they get support from us. That's why that-- the-- the practical examples what that time.

And the recent examples that-- with the conference. And the religious council with several suggestions. That was the first time for some of those religious leaders that they come to cover. They-- they have never had a chance to visit (UNINTEL PHRASE). Their-- their husband said that, "Could you organize such events in other part of Afghanistan?" And with a more-- religious leaders or religious students, whatever, according to their own understanding to be part of this program.

One of the religious men, he said that, "Why aren't you people talk because a woman's right because you-- we know that you are-- supported by American. You are supported by Europeans. Why you never talked about men rights?" (LAUGHTER) And that was a religious man because you're also say that men is also-- the rights of men is also violated in our society like a person.

Because we see that civ-- civilian casualty. And we see that how-- people of-- get punishment from-- by-- by different names. That is-- that's the reality. But we must to work-- we must to close the door and we must to start. We-- if we ignore, there is no way. And for the last point that when we talk about peace, without women there is no peace at all. That is proved in all (UNINTEL PHRASE). And it is also (UNINTEL PHRASE) it's also in (UNINTEL PHRASE) proofs. And woman of (UNINTEL PHRASE) prove that woman could play a great role in all the governments.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Next question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi. Thank you very much for all of your presentations. But everything that you've

discusses is a little bit abstract in terms of rights. And I was wondering about the investment in the country-- in terms of-- the business sector.

And, you know, in terms-- you know, women have always had these problems. (LAUGH) You know, and I'm sure that you're aware of it. But, you know, there's talk of-- you know, doing some sort of-- you know-- economical survey of, you know, minerals, where they are. You know, who can extract them.

Not necessarily always-- you know, because-- you know, there are a lotta people who-- internationally and a little bit up-- upset with the United States and everything that's been happening. Rather than put us all in, like, you know, one camp. And we're just the ones (LAUGH)-- in Afghanistan.

I mean, consortium with the E.U., Russia, U.S., China. Businesses coming in. More jobs for women. But in terms of you individually, in terms of you trying to find a business or having working groups to bring that in. Because if it's 50% women, 50% men, you can't just have 50% men working and then telling the other 50% of the women what to do in the country. They will need you. It's a matter of being needed rather than just--

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

What's--

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

--being at home.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

--what's your question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

My question is, have you done some sort of a survey on who you can bring in terms of companies? Rather than just education and law?

LIDA NADERY:

May I answer?

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Yes.

(OVERTALK)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

No, Lida, you answer. (UNINTEL PHRASE).

LIDA NADERY:

That-- that's a really good question. And-- that's what we are really thinking about because how to make these women economically independent. Fortunately, there is a group of women entrepreneur that they are bringing all the-- women-- businesswomen together.

And it's called L.E.A.D. And they are-- what they are doing, they are internet investing. It's a local organization. We do not want to do again the same mistake, you know, asking-- other or searching or (UNINTEL PHRASE) for other international company. How-- however, it's very good.

But we want women themselves to stand and start their own small businesses. There is a one-- just few days ago when-- taxi company to-- started the business. It's-- lead by a woman. She is taking the lead on all the businesses. And we are supporting that-- initiative.

The survey which was done-- to answer your-- other part of the question-- the-- and the survey has been already done by-- this group of women. So far we have more than 1,000 women-- Afghan women that is (UNINTEL PHRASE) just start with the-- Afghan Investment Agency, which is called A.S.A.-- (UNINTEL PHRASE). But unfortunately only 600 of these women-- businesswomen entrepreneur is active. And we're trying to make the other-- businesswomen who are-- not-- inactive to make them active for-- connect them with the problems.

So that-- that-- this work is already going on. And in the mine sector, it's-- already government of-- the g-- Ministry of Mine has taken the initiative to start exploring and doing assessment where in Afghanistan we can start-- mining or doing the-- the work. So it's a very complicated issue and it will really help.

And that one big chapter is the women-- mine. How they can include-- women in this sector as well. And it's-- and they're go-- way. And it's-- the final one which is not related to your answer, but I would-- emphasize on that. The women inheritance-- which is very important for us. And through that we-- women's-- through that they can inherent property and land. And it will make them ec-- economically independent. And that work is also-- on the process. Women Civil Organization has started providing much more awareness how these women can

really receive their inheritance. And-- or property through-- to get their property and land. And they can start the businesses-- small businesses through that. It's all I would (UNINTEL PHRASE).

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I-- I was talkin' major businesses. Rather than just small businesses.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Maybe you could ask that (UNINTEL PHRASE).

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

No, I-- I-- I understand. But it-- just in terms of the clarity.

LIDA NADERY:

Well, these businesses--

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

If you solicit the major businesses on your own and try to get working groups rather than just the smaller businesses.

LIDA NADERY:

I think these are very-- this L.E.A.D.-- organize-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) group that I've talked, it is a small business-- it's a big business, also. It's not only-- they are exporting dry food also to foreign countries, along with the (UNINTEL PHRASE). So it's not small--

(OVERTALK)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I see. Okay. All right.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Well, thanks for--

(OVERTALK)

LIDA NADERY:

Let me tell you, like-- in Afghanistan, everything is happening in a very short time space. A small initiative has been taken place. But it's not comparable to-- as when-- it's not really United States. We still have-- long distance to go.

Extractive industry-- discussion is just coming up. Like, that's the big-- thing-- about economic stability in the country. And-- there are some-- initiatives about, like, to see what role woman can play with that. Traditionally, woman has been involved with cottage in-- industries, in (UNINTEL PHRASE) industry. And so far the initiatives is in that-- small entrepreneurship.

But I think-- your-- your suggestion and your thinking is very right. That we have to think about-- largely in-- big-- but it's like we cannot do everything in one day. And it's like a evolution process. And I think the thinking is already heading there. And-- it's a really good-- question, I think. I-- maybe fruit for thought (LAUGH) for this group as well.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

So I'm an Afghan girl. I have dreams and hopes for a country that's peaceful. And that respects woman and human rights. My question is, what are the hopes for the new-- generation? For the new leaders? Future leaders that they can (UNINTEL PHRASE)?

For example, if I wanna-- I wanna graduate and become a leader in the future. Am I going to be killed on second day of my job? (LAUGHTER) And another question is-- I was actually really mad when the law was denied-- with-- by parliament. How can we let men decide what law should be in Afghanistan constitution?

Because as you talked about achievements, one of the achievements that we have Afghan woman in-- in the parliament. And man cannot just say, "Oh, we do not like this law." Because when we are in parliament, it's not about what we like and what we don't. It's about what we can prove that's right.

And when I read this-- the list of laws-- in the-- violence against woman, it's all about education, not beating woman, not killing woman. There's, like, if you're talking about sharia law, Koran law or Afghanistan law, there's nothing saying that this is right. So why do the Afghanistan woman, they all kept quiet while those men denied those laws? Thank you so much.

(OVERTALK)

LIDA NADERY:

If a woman of Afghanistan to fight for that, then you were on the streets. We were there (UNINTEL PHRASE) for that. (LAUGH) I know that how you didn't see and how you didn't know about that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Yeah. How can they deny it? They cannot deny this. Like, because if we all fight for it. Like, what were some of the reasons you mean the government is not with Afghan woman? Is it the president? Are we hoping for a good president? Or are we hoping that all--

Because you cannot say that all Afghan men are bad. I have seen so many good men. And I believe that there are so many good men in the parliament. I actually-- I was thinking that we should reopen that case. That-- that they denied law. And we should ask those people who denies, "What's your reason why you deny it? Because you will lose power?" It's not about power. It's about-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) justice.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay. You need a great big microphone and you're gonna have-- (LAUGHTER) okay. (APPLAUSE)

(OVERTALK)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

It is-- I-- I-- want-- I wanna-- that's Nila (PH). Ni-- Nila is studying to become the-- future president of Afghanistan. (APPLAUSE)

(OVERTALK)

PALWASHA HASAN:

Can I say something, Eliza?

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Of course.

PALWASHA HASAN:

Because it's-- it's very-- I-- I love to hear you (LAUGH)-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) because this is very ideal worlds that all men understand-- what is-- what's good for women and men. And-- unless we are (UNINTEL PHRASE) I don't think we can really form a good and ideal world. But it takes ages for nations to reach to that level.

I-- I heard even in United States, like, few years back they would not let woman-- in the politics. I think it started from Madeline Albright to be first woman in the-- on that level in the-- foreign office. And for a country like Afghanistan with 30 years of war and continuity of the war-- this-- there's so much low level of s-- social-- development that this takes.

It will take long time-- to make that changes. We all want to reach there sooner. And I think that is our wish. That is-- our ideal world. If you see our vision statement, we want to reach there. And I think with the help of young woman like we-- who we (UNINTEL PHRASE) there. But we are fighting for that to-- reach there. We-- with woman in the pol-- politics-- you-- your question is very good question.

I think we-- it's wonderful (UNINTEL PHRASE) for for those women to be there in a large number. But it-- I think the political maturity for them-- for all of them to understand what is woman's right-- we still didn't-- reach that. We-- our next stage is that, like, how to bring the right-- mentality. Or the woman who are coming independently to be (UNINTEL PHRASE) as in the parliament. That-- that is our-- that should be our goal-- to make sure that we have the right (UNINTEL PHRASE) there who support us. Not to create a hindrance for us.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay, great. Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Okay, two more questions. Very tough act to follow. (LAUGHTER) I'm not sure if this is on but I'm plenty loud. So-- just a quick kind of technical question. Somebody had said that there were surveys done recent-- surveys done that show there was an increase-- amongst men for-- support for women in the political process.

And then someone else said that there's this growing conservative movement. So-- and we've heard this not just in Afghanistan but in other countries. If somebody could explain that a little bit more. And what is being done to combat this apparent divide-- on an educational level, not just kinda at the elementary level for boys. But also young adolescents. That's it. Thank you so much for being here today.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

(UNINTEL PHRASE) who would like to take that?

(OVERTALK)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Go.

HASINA SAFI:

When we say a great conservativ-- --ism, it's more-- among the political clout in Afghanistan. Even the religious people-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) sorry?

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Whoops, there you go.

HASINA SAFI:

Okay. Sorry. We are not used to such a model. (LAUGHTER) We still have the old model. I think that-- conservatism-- when we are explaining that's growing, it's among the political groups who work not only as stated-- with-- it's more like-- using a (UNINTEL PHRASE) in politics.

It's also because woman has been very vocal on-- talking about (UNINTEL). Or talking about human right abuses and all that. And those people who are (UNINTEL PHRASE) in those political groups are in power. And that is kind of like (UNINTEL PHRASE).

And they-- they (UNINTEL) every day woman like-- it is like a third law which has been challenged in the parliament of Afghanistan. To-- and-- their intention, you can see, it's more like limiting woman. And-- there we are talking like Taliban is-- are not the only challenge for woman's right. You know, other groups-- in-- in-- in that-- conservatism move, we are talking-- we are-- we're also identifying other groups as part of the challenge. And-- when we are saying-- that-- like-- 67% of the male-- is it--

(OVERTALK)

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Seventy-six.

HASINA SAFI:

Seventy-six percent of the-- men approve-- a woman to participate in election. That is the wider Afghan community. I think-- I-- I-- the Afghan community didn't-- as I said, mention about the education part-- as an example. There has been a opening in the community.

Or-- when Mary talked about-- at one village-- of-- of a tribal-- of a tribe came to Kabul to-- to support a rape-- of a wom-- a young woman. The taboos has been-- broken. This is big-- change for me because-- ten years back, people would hide woman's rape cases-- because it was a second-- death to the family.

First was like the-- girl is-- raped. The second was like the whole family it was a big shame. But today if a (UNINTEL) tribe came with one girl and said, "I want justice for her," this is already for me a success. The community's not ashamed-- not only ashamed but they're asking for justice. And that is a poor-- group of-- the community-- and a minority in the north of Afghanistan.

And they're coming with their daughter. And they're very poor people that they don't have even place to stay. So for the shelter organization, it's not only to shelter the family but to support the whole clan who are-- sitting in Kabul and saying, "We want justice and we will not go without having justice."

(OVERTALK)

HASINA SAFI:

Today that woman as you taking back to the community and she's happily living that. That is the change of attitude which is happening.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

That's-- maybe, Mary, could you tell us a little bit about that case? That's-- that's fascinating.

MARY AKRAMI:

I think that case is-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) has all (UNINTEL PHRASE) and all media and a lot of friends are talking or doing advocacy for their own benefit, I'm sorry to say. (LAUGH) But I'm so glad, I'm so happy that we were part of that as-- as a local organization.

As a woman organization that we took the lead. And they come to us because they were for a year they were fighting to have access to justice. To-- in their own provinces. Unfortunately, they couldn't but they come to Kabul. And then they come to us as a woman that we are running shelter. And-- that is a (UNINTEL

PHRASE) case. And-- you might be aware. And everyone is involved. Especially the-- the way that they were-- they were lost their dignity. And-- but attack of a group of-- local police which is another-- another-- big challenge for Afghanistan.

Like, (UNINTEL PHRASE) systems like supporting local-- local police and supporting that-- national police. That is another big challenge for Afghanistan and gender security wise. And-- and particular for a woman of Afghanistan. That family, that community, that they were really (UNINTEL PHRASE).

They are following their case but always support. And I really would admire and-- acknowledge the support of other friends. That they as a activist, as a-- as one that they're always try to be united and to fight for that. And-- that was a (UNINTEL PHRASE) force.

But-- but I said the case (UNINTEL PHRASE) we got success. The-- the-- that was the first time that case-- the-- the court was open to media. Five minutes before the op-- the media, the court was to start, I receive a call from-- from-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) community elders.

And as well from the parliament members. "Do not-- bring media inside. Just stop." Until late night we were fighting and asking the (UNINTEL PHRASE) and the human rights commissions. And we said that, "No." Because this family come to media and they want to have access to justice.

And that was their-- courage. They really gave us more encourage. And they really-- is-- push us that to-- to be behind them. And really got success to-- open the courts-- to media. And that was-- the first time in a culture of Afghanistan in general that a rape case comes to media. And the-- a rapist-- got-- punishment. And they went to-- for-- one of-- for 20 years. And due to-- elimination ballots against woman's lost 16 years. Eight people got arrested. And still they are the-- jail.

But we (UNINTEL PHRASE) and the famous are still under-- attacks because the fa-- father is-- it's a long story. So (UNINTEL PHRASE) but I'm happy and we are-- really admire and appreciate other friends at the international level to be (UNINTEL PHRASE). And as well that (UNINTEL PHRASE).

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Great. We have five minutes left and I think there are three questions that I can see. Javet (PH), did you have a question, too?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Yes.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

So why don't we do this. Why don't you each ask your questions. We'll do a round up. I think we only have the three who are-- in the line. I think that's where we're gonna-- so why don't you ask your question and then pass the mic to Javet and then to man who also had a question. We'll get them all rounded up and we'll use the last five minutes to answer them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

First of all, I want to thank you all today for coming over here. And all for the great work you're doing in Afghanistan. The question I had, since the budget cut-- was the first and big challenge. I was hoping that corruption, the increasing of corruption would be one of the biggest challenges, too.

Because during the past decade-- Afghanistan have received a lot of fund from the international community. Like, we would see-- like a big bucket of fund. But only a few drops have been invested in-- in-- in women issues. So-- how is it affecting-- women of Afghanistan? And-- and what solution do you guys see for it?
(BACKGROUND VOICE)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE). I have three quick questions . The first one (LAUGHTER)-- the-- the first--
(OVERTALK)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

--full of question, as you said.
(ELIZA GRISWOLD: UNINTEL)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

You also talked about conservatism and the growth of conservatism. Now the question is, what are the key factors that contribute to conservatives-- conservatism? And how to deal with this? First. Second one. The second question is, beside all the advocacy, training, capacity building, quote-unquote, all these you-- have been doing for the last ten years in Afghanistan.

Why has violence has skyrocketed against women? Every day there is a case and we read it as-- their nose has been cut. Their hands, all these and that. And the third one. In two weeks there will be a presidential election. And I'm sure that each one of

you have a clear account of each candidate. And who will you vote? And (LAUGHTER) who you think-- who do you think has the best-- the best-- the best plan for the woman of Afghanistan?

(ELIZA GRISWOLD: UNINTEL)

MANIZHA NADERI:

In terms of-- domestic violence in-- increasing in Afghanistan, violence against women, violence hasn't increased. Violence has always been in Afghanistan. All of-- all of-- you know, in centuries-- for centuries here there have been violence against women of-- in Afghanistan. Women know about their rights now. They're coming--

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

But the issue of cutting noses, lips is something new.

VOICES:

No, it's not.

(OVERTALK)

MANIZHA NADERI:

That's right. It's not new. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Now the media-- the media's covering it. People know about their rights. They're coming out. Before things like that happened-- it's-- it's-- it's happening more than we know. There-- it's happening in the villages.

Nobody's-- nobody knows about it. People, you know, they-- women are killed and they're buried. And that's what-- what happened before. But now-- now people know that their rights. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And the media's there. That's why we-- we hear more stories about-- violence against women.

ELIZA GRISWOLD:

Okay. So we could be here for three more hours happily. (LAUGHTER) So I would suggest if you have a question that you didn't get a chance to ask, or if you asked too many questions and they haven't been answered, just go and grab one of these women on their way out. And-- and that-- that is it. I'm sorry, we're done.

(APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *