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WOMEN AFTER THE ARAB AWAKENING: MAKING CHANGE

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RANDA NAFFA
SADAQA
Jordan

SOUAD SIAOUI
Isis Center
Morocco

Others Present:

STEPHEN McINERNEY
Project on Middle East Democracy

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Vital Voices

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Thank you so much for being with us today for what I think is going to be a fantastic discussion with four women making change in the Arab world. Today's event is an unprecedented partnership for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institute working together with colleagues from Vital Voices and the project on Middle East Democracy.

I think most of you know I came back to Brookings this spring after a couple of years at the State Department, and one of the real joys of my work there was supervising the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which is a U.S. Government program to support the work of civil society actors across the region. And as part of that, MEPI supported a fantastic project by Vital Voices working with these four amazing women and their counterparts across the Arab world.

So what you're going to hear about today is the culmination of a great deal of work and I'm really delighted to welcome here Malini Patel, the senior director for Middle East and North Africa at Vital Voices who will tell us a little bit about the context for today's event.

MS. PATEL: Thank you, Tamara.

It is such a pleasure to be here, and I am very excited that these amazing women leaders are here with us today. As Tamara had mentioned, Vital Voices took on this project with the support of MEPI about two years ago, and Vital Voices works with women leaders around the world and has been working with women leaders in MENA for over 10 years in political and private life, human rights, and economic development. And we are delighted that our MEPI partner is also here with us. Thank you, Vanessa, for joining. And they really did notice at a time when nobody else did, the

impact women leaders can have and the impact that they can have in a changing, transitioning society. Nobody could have ever even imagined what happened as of December 2010 and where we are today.

We will hear from these women leaders who have maneuvered within their environments, brought together the various voices within their communities and in their countries to make positive change. Representing Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, these women demonstrate the impact of women's leadership in the Middle East and North Africa. I also want to thank Brookings Institution and the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) for their support on this event today. It is very much appreciated to have these partners supporting women in the region. We really appreciate it.

And I'll hand it back to Tamara, because the most important people to be speaking today are these women. So thank you, Tamara.

MS. WITTES: Thank you, Malini. And let me now introduce briefly for you the panel that you'll hear from in just a moment. You have their full biographical information in the handouts that you got as you came in. There are more outside if you didn't pick them up on the way in. So I won't read out their very distinguished biographies, but just going across here we have Souad Siaoui from the Isis Center in Morocco. We have Randa Naffa from Jordan, who worked with SADAQA toward a friendly working environment for women in Jordan; Marianne Ibrahim from Egypt, from the Al Gisir Center for Development; and Lina Ahmed from Lebanon of the Lebanese League for Women in Business.

I'm going to ask them each to speak very briefly, outlining for you the work that they've undertaken through this project over the last couple of years. We'll have a little bit of discussion about some of the issues that their work reveals regarding

women's status and the efforts of women in this time of tumult and change in the Arab Middle East and then we'll open it up for a conversation with all of you. So Souad, would you like to begin?

MS. SIAOUI: Thank you. Thank you very much for your presentation and thank you very much for all the members of the staff of Vital Voices for receiving us and for the organization of these very interesting events.

So the work of the Moroccan advocacy campaign concentrated on the issue of early marriage in Morocco. Why early marriage in Morocco? Because it is one of the greatest issues that has been raised for a long time and has mostly become predominant after the amendments of the family -- new family code in Morocco in 2004, so whereby the age of marriage was stated to be 18 years old for both sexes. But in another article of the (speaking in Moroccan), the new family code, it was stated that the judge has discretion to allow girls to marry at the age of 15, which allows parents, judges, lawyers, and the whole society to benefit from this gap in the new family code.

So we try through our work to raise the population's awareness about the risk and the danger of this social practice and the many economic, physical, psychological effects that may have -- that this phenomenon may have on the girls, the child girls marrying. So we concentrated on this phenomenon of early marriage and also on the phenomenon of rape in Morocco, whereby the rapist can marry his victim without - and he is free of the charge of giving money or of being put in jail which is really an injustice towards these young girls.

So we have succeeded by the end to raise the awareness of those people. We involved a lot of social categories from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and we tried to put pressure on the government in order to repeal these two articles. And effectively, this has given a good result, especially that's

immediately after the conference -- the international conference that hosted more than seven foreign countries from Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Nigeria, and other countries.

So immediately after that, the governments held an official meeting discussing the possibility of repealing this issue. And you are very optimistic that this will work and we can improve the young girls' situation in Morocco, especially through education because I believe that educating women is educating the whole world. It's giving benefit not only to the woman but also the whole society.

So now I'm open to any questions. Thank you very much.

MS. WITTES: Souad, thank you so much. You know, you and the team of activists that put together this awareness and advocacy campaign in Morocco, you began from seeing that there was this gap in the law.

MS. SIAOUI: Yeah.

MS. WITTES: That the legal age of marriage had been raised but there was an exception that people were really exploiting. But as you began your work you came to confront that this wasn't only a legal issue; that there were economic issues and social and cultural practices that were preventing this law from taking effect in communities. Can you talk a little bit about what arguments you made in local communities as you worked to persuade people that underage marriage was bad for the community?

MS. SIAOUI: Yeah. So effectively, at the beginning, and I would like to mention that working with Vital Voices helped us to raise this issue very early -- at the very early moments. Then, the government paid attention to it through the event, the big event of this recite of Amina Filali in the north of Morocco. So when we raised this issue, which was supposed to be taboo because it is not supposed to -- we are not supposed to talk about not marrying a girl -- not allowing a girl to get married because of education or

of other reasons. So we are very proud to be the first to initiate and to launch these projects and to work on it. And I'm quite sure that the project has made a lot of impact on the population.

The arguments we used is we tried through the campaign to involve several categories of people. We included doctors, medical doctors, so they talked to the audience from the health perspective, and they explained to the people. And went to rural areas and one important thing we did is we invited a doctor, medical doctor, who is from the area and who is very familiar with the community and he was speaking to people about the many dangers and the risk. And this is why we focused in our study on the importance of talking to people about things they understand, about issues that touch them, and I think early marriage is a phenomenon which touches people and brings people from the area, talking to them, talking to them in the language they speak because, you know, in Morocco we have two dialects, two languages. We have Moroccan Arabic and you have another language which is Berber. So when bringing this doctor, he started talking to the population but in Berber. Its linguistic communication is very important there. Then we brought judges. We brought lawyers. We had in the final conference, we had a member, a medical doctor who is a member of the parliament, who also talked about this and tackled the issue from the political point of view. And she brought all the recommendations to the government and this actually gave a good effect.

So we tried to be close to people, to address the grassroots. And as most of the campaign are academics, are highly educated people, they get down to speak to people in their language, talking to them, explain to them. And there were a lot of times, for example, like the translation of the document of marriage into Berber, into Moroccan Arabic. All those things had an effect because many people in the rural areas do not even know what the family code is. There is a change, but who knows this? It is

only educated people.

So we get down to these rural areas, talking to people. There were attempts to translate this medical -- these papers and getting people to know their rights, because once you are aware of your rights and you empower the person, then you expect to have good results. Yeah.

MS. WITTES: Souad, thank you so much. And I want to turn now to Randa because you also confronted an issue of public awareness, working in Jordan on the working environment faced by women and trying to turn law into realities.

MS. NAFFA: Yes. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for the introduction, and thank you, Malini, for the introduction. I'm really delighted to be here and to be speaking at Brookings. I see many of my friends and colleagues among the audience, so thank you for making it out here.

So let me just give you a little bit of background at SADAQA. I've been involved in gender rights throughout my life, but in the past year and a half and through the support of Vital Voices we launched the SADAQA campaign. And SADAQA aims to support a work-friendly environment for women, but we decided to focus on a particular article in the Jordanian Labor Law, which is article 72. And this article says that companies that have more than -- or companies that have 20 working women are required to provide daycare given that they have 10 children under the age of four. Basically, what this means is that if this article is activated, it will not only increase the percentage of women's participation in the labor force, but it will also help women maintain their careers. Because if you look at statistics in Jordan, and unfortunately, Jordan lags behind when it comes to economic participation, especially compared to education enrollments. We have one of the highest literacy rates in the region but we have one of the highest -- lowest, unfortunately, economic participation rates.

And this means is it means, you know, it's affecting all development indicators negatively, and even, I mean, my colleague here, Paula Bryan and I did an assessment report recently and we found out that, you know, economic participation for women affects also population growth and fertility rates. Again, Jordan has one of the highest fertility rates in the region.

So when we started off with the campaign, we did the focus group research because we wanted to understand where this law stands, what are the challenges, what are the benefits for both women and the employers. And one of the main results of the research was that we found out that unfortunately, women were not aware that the law existed in the first place, as with other, you know, labor laws. And at the same time, employers -- I'm sure most of them are aware of it; they try to ignore it, but there were a good number of employers who were not also aware of the law. So we had to, you know, change our strategy, focus more on awareness raising, and also not only awareness raising but instill in women a rights-based perspective. And I agree with you that's very important because once women, you know, know that it is a right and not a benefit, then you have the first step towards change. Because unfortunately, sometimes there confusion between what's my right and -- between the rights and the benefits. And even in cases where there were daycares at companies, women thought that it was a benefit provided by the employer. So we had to do a lot of education, a lot of workshops, a lot of one-on-one meetings with HR personnel, with working mothers, with daycare providers to get the word out to women.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. As I was reading the case study -- are there copies outside? Vital Voices has put together a wonderful document summarizing the work that all of these teams and others did across the region and I really urge you to pick it up and read it. but one of the things that was fascinating about the challenge that you

confronted in Jordan is that it wasn't only a lack of awareness or a lack of will on the part of the companies, but it turned out that the ministry responsible for enforcing this law, the Ministry of Labor, found itself in a little bit of a conflict with the Ministry of Social Development that was in charge of monitoring daycares.

MS. NAFFA: Yes. Yes.

MS. WITTES: Can you talk a little bit about the governmental side?

MS. NAFFA: Sure. Sure. So the first step with us -- for us was to basically go and lobby the government and really understand what's holding them back from activating this law. And we found out that they are also fearful of enforcing the law because from experience they said that, you know, if we activate this law that it might backfire on women's employment altogether because the employers might stop employing women all together or stop employing at number 19 because the law says 20, or stop employing women who are pregnant or are about to get married. And the numbers in Jordan, you know, are consistent with that, because if you look at the labor force, most women in the labor force are under the age of 30, which tells you a lot. You know, it tells you that either women are not entering the market, or once they get pregnant or married they leave the market.

So we had to find a way where we should work with the government to enforce the law but at the same time make sure that it doesn't backlash on women's employment. So that was one issue there. At the same time, we held a major workshop and we tried to invite all the parties together. And we discovered for the first time that two government bodies involved in daycares in Jordan never spoke together on the issue. So the Ministry of Social Development, which is the entity responsible for licensing, registering daycares, and the Ministry of Labor, who is responsible for enforcing Article 72, never spoke to each other. Okay? So we had to put them together, you know, and

throw the issue on the table and, you know, allow them to discuss this in an honest and frank way. And as a result, I can now tell you which is a very good step, they formed a joint legal committee to study the law and provide a clear guideline for -- that is adoptable for the corporate sector. So cohesive guidelines that will take into consideration the guidelines provided to the Ministry of Social Development, and at the same time make it more adaptable and easy to implement by the Ministry of Labor.

MS. WITTES: Thank you so much. And fascinating that an NGO effort ends up mediating between government and mainstream.

MS. NAFFA: But that's always the case, isn't it?

MS. WITTES: But when you want to get things done, sometimes it's what you have to do.

MS. NAFFA: Yeah.

MS. WITTES: So let me turn now, Marianne, to you. I was really struck listening to your colleagues at their emphasis on trying to create a rights-based perspective among women and men on these issues. And it seems to me that this is part of the broader change that's taking place across the Arab world. There's a shift in perspective of people from expecting the state to provide benefits to subjects versus citizens demanding rights from government. And this is, of course, the struggle that you've been in the midst of in Egypt. And your project was focused specifically on the issue of women and women's status and rights in the constitution-making process. Can you tell us a little bit about how that works?

MS. IBRAHIM: Thank you, Tamara.

First, I would like to thank Vital Voices for making this happen and for enduring the whole trip because on the contrary of my colleagues -- Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon here -- Egypt has a very special situation. It's a mess at the moment and

that's very special. (Laughter)

When we started this project, we didn't have anything. We didn't have a constitution. We didn't have a parliament. We didn't have a government. We had only a military junta ruling the world, ruling the country, and an interim government. And -- but a lot of expectations and a lot of hopes because people were just out on the streets demanding for their rights, not waiting for the governments to give them but actually they took the streets for rights, for social justice, and freedom, and bread.

And the idea of the project -- this project was based on hope and on the great expectations of Egyptians, especially Egyptian women because it was remarkable because we took the streets and we paid lives. We fought right next to men and that was amazing. So the whole idea was to tour the country, to listen to women. What do they want in the new constitution? What are their hopes and what are their dreams and what are their demands?

So we prepared a survey and we sent out two mail researchers and that was made on purpose, that we wanted to include men on our campaign and on all our work. We prepared the scientific survey and a study, and we toured the country meeting women from different backgrounds and different levels, rural areas and industrial cities. And even inside the cities, asking them what do they want in the new constitution?

Afterwards, we prepared the list analysis and a list of demands of this is what we heard from the women. And we wanted to present it first to the parliament but then the parliament was dissolved. And we wanted to present to the first committee writing the constitution and this was, too, a result by court. And in the middle of the project we found ourselves stuck because we have this amazing study with all these great demands. These are the women's voices that we have collected but actually have no one to present it to. And then we decided to go public instead of talking only to

politicians so we invited youth and we had a concert and we brought a folk -- an Egyptian female folklore singer. Her job was to collect songs about women from different parts of the country and we had a public concert that we made the demands available and we asked the youth attending the concert to support us.

And after the elections we had an elected president and a government. We expected that things would get better but they didn't because we had a conservative - - a religious conservative government and a new regime, and the whole political scene didn't consider women's rights as priorities. So we started lobbying with the second committee writing the constitution. We spoke to former members of the parliament and liberal members of the committee. We pressured them and the media until we managed to get a hearing. And that was not easy at all because we were asked to go inside and just tell everyone our demands and just get out. No discussions, no questions asked. And we tried to get the support from liberal members, other politicians. Unfortunately, they didn't consider women's rights as priorities at the moment. They told us that the country has a lot of issues, a lot of political fighting, and that's not the time for women's rights. So just keep it aside for now.

But that didn't stop us. We lobbied. We spoke to them and we managed to keep -- we had 14 demands that we collected from the women that we spoke to. We managed to keep two of them on the draft of the constitution that was just published. Unfortunately, we couldn't pressure for the rest but -- and this comes the second phase of the project that we are lobbying against the draft. That is just out because it's not doing any justice to women's rights and we are preparing at the moment a social ad and a campaign against the draft because we think that women deserve more in their constitution. We are 54 percent of the country's population and we deserve to be acknowledged in a better way in a constitution that we helped make after a revolution in

the country.

We are asking for health care benefits for women. We are asking women to be allowed to hold top positions in the country because this is very important. We are demanding to change the electoral system, the lists where women are not -- which is not doing women any justice. And we are demanding that forming political parties has to have a quota of 40 percent of women in their boards to allow more political participation for women and also that the country would dedicate a portion -- a dedicated portion of its national budget only for women's issues.

MS. WITTES: Marianne, thank you. You know, as you launched your project, you noted that you faced an incredible challenge of uncertainty, that the political institutions that you needed to lobby were changing or being dissolved or operating in ways that nobody quite understood.

But there was an additional challenge that you faced at the very beginning of the implementation of your project. These are Egyptian NGOs, Egyptian organizations reaching out to do focus groups and advocacy among Egyptian citizens about the writing of the new Egyptian constitution. And in the midst of all of this, the transitional government led by the military counsel, decided to crack down on NGOs. Can you tell us a little bit about how that affected what you were trying to do?

MS. IBRAHIM: Before the revolution it was very common that we get pressured by security, and it was very common that our e-mails are being monitored. Then you get phone calls in the middle of the night or in the middle of a workshop from a security agent telling you I know who you are, what you're doing here, and so and so. And I remember a couple of months before the revolution I was in upper Egypt holding a workshop and I used to get phone calls from security on my personal cell phone telling me, "Yeah, now you are out of the hotel. What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going

shopping.” And then, “Yeah. Don’t be late.” And that was common. Changing venues was common. That sort of pressure from the security.

And after the revolution there was this huge case pressuring NGOs, international and national, so that really disrupted our work because with the legal pressure and the legal cases against NGOs, there was a media campaign, a hate campaign against us in the national and even privately owned newspapers and TVs. And people, before the revolution, ordinary people, our targeted audience that we helped and served, they didn’t know much about how NGOs work. But after this campaign they had all the wrong information. So when you approach someone, like a woman in a certain village that you want to work with, they will just ask you who you are, who do you work with, where did you get your money? You’re the rich people. You’re the spies. You get the American money and so on. We had to keep a very low profile because it was very dangerous because it was not only pressure from security apparatus, but it was the pressure and the hatred came from people who had all the wrong information. That was not very easy when you try to serve someone who has -- who thinks that you are a spy.

MS. WITTES: And do you feel that -- do you feel, now that the draft is out and there is this period of public debate, as I understand it, this new phase of your campaign you’re doing ads on TV and you’re doing a lot of public advocacy. Are you hopeful that you’re going to be able to have impact before the constitution is finalized?

MS. IBRAHIM: We’re trying to work on two levels. I don’t want to express my personal feelings here because they are not relevant, because no matter how I feel I’ll still keep working. But we’re trying to work on two levels because now the NGOs, the Egyptian and international working in Egypt, are a little bit in a better position because the government is bigger fish to fight with. So we are a bit at ease at the moment. We’re working with; we’re lobbying with related NGOs working on the same

issue about women's rights and the constitution, lobbying against the draft. And we also try to join forces and to support other political powers who are against the draft for different reasons because like it or not, women's issues and rights are not a priority in the country, in Egypt at the moment, especially, even with politicians because they are busy with other things. So what we're trying to do is that we're trying to acknowledge the forces of political powers who are against the draft for other reasons and we try to join forces. And our aim is to bring down this draft because it's not doing justice to women's rights and liberties.

MS. WITTES: Thank you so much, Marianne.

And Lina, it's odd to say this, but over the last two years, Lebanon's government has been one of the more stable in the region.

MS. AHMED: Relatively.

MS. WITTES: Relatively. Everything is relative.

MS. AHMED: Until last week.

MS. WITTES: And you came to this project as part of an organization of Lebanese business women. And like your colleagues in Jordan, you were looking at issues of women's participation in the economy. Can you tell us a little bit about what your focus was and the work that you've been doing advocating for change in the Lebanese laws that affect women?

MS. AHMED: Basically, the Lebanese League for Women in Business is an organization that we formed back in 2006, and our main focus is to empower women in business -- professional women in business so they become entrepreneurs. Very well-skilled entrepreneurs. About 140 members, most of which -- either high executives or entrepreneurs. One of our main pillars is to advocate for their rights in the work force. Accordingly, we have decided to tackle one single law that is discriminative against

women in the workforce. And we got a grant from the funding from Vital Voices and the full support along with it.

But along the way, after a while, once we got to know this law and we talked to people, we gathered the many people within small focus groups, if I may say that. Upon deciding to go for the campaign, this law has already been passed. We knew unofficially that this law has been passed so we changed strategy and we had to move -- we had to go back to point zero and to a different law. Accordingly, we have put in contact with an organization which is a governmental organization headed by the first lady and it's called the National Council for Lebanese Women and they deal with women's issues. They have identified 15 laws that are discriminative against women in the labor laws and the social security laws. That was our best chance because this is how we can create an alliance with a governmental organization in order to change laws within the government, especially that they are very efficient. It is a group of 25 -- the board is 25 and there's one man, a lawyer, very efficient, very impactful and very well connected to all the MPs and the head of political parties in the country, which is very rare to find someone who really has this balance formula.

So this is how we started our campaign. We created this alliance and we started working on the remaining laws. And now we have a law that will be signed very soon. It has been signed actually by the official committees, but it needs to be announced. Officially it has to be spoken out in the government and it's about maternity leave. So things are moving in our country despite the political situation, despite the instability. But at least because we are targeting laws that they're not political, they're not religious, and this gives us an edge in areas, speaking of Lebanon or any other country in order to make it happen.

One of the main challenges is the political situation, just like in every

other country. Another challenge is also, again, in our part of the world, and I think in many parts of the world, not only the Arab world, the woman is not a priority. Women's issues are not a priority. It's always like as if they're giving the women, we have done that for you. It's not as if it's a right. It's a favor. It's a favor; we've done that for you. You know. I'm here to support you as if I'm doing something really important. No, this is not the case. And I think this is a bit global.

So that's what we are doing now. And for next year, we got inspired by the Jordanian story. We're looking for funds now and we will tackle this issue again in Lebanon for next year. And surprisingly, I think I was speaking to a lawyer about this. There were two lawyers in the room actually, and one of them said this law exists. Yes, there must be a nursery within any company that exceeds a certain number of women, working women. And the second lawyer goes like, are you sure? I'm not sure about this. You know? So awareness is really a major, major component in our current campaign, as well as in the next coming campaigns.

MS. WITTES: Even among the experts, awareness is not what it could be.

MS. AHMED: Definitely.

MS. WITTES: Well, Lina, I want to pick up something you said. You said that you were inspired by the experience of your Jordanian colleagues and the success that they've had in trying to get daycare in the workplace. One premise of the project that all of you were involved in was the importance of networking, not only within countries, and each of you were part of a team within your country, an advocacy coalition if you will, but also networking across countries.

So Lina, maybe you could start us off. Tell us a little bit about what the connections with other activists across the Arab world meant for you as you were doing

this work.

MS. AHMED: You mean as far as my colleagues are concerned or other NGOs, the society across the region?

MS. WITTES: The connections that you built through the Vital Voices project.

MS. AHMED: Well, actually, it was through the Vital Voices that they have created a network. It was kind of we have a Facebook page. We continuously connect. We meet. The last time we met in Jordan to discuss and to exchange the experience that we have faced in our campaigns. And this is one of the visits also today is to also exchange the experience. And Vital Voices, they're there all the time. For instance, it's not -- something that my colleagues also mentioned in the past two days is it's not like any other funder whereby they give you the money and they say, okay, you just report to us at the end. Once the count is there, it's done. The support is continuous, all the time. Despite the time difference, we never felt it. So I think Christie was working overnight answering our e-mails.

MS. WITTES: As each of you, as you connected with women activists in other countries, was there anything that surprised you? Did you learn anything that surprised you in making those connections?

MS. NAFFA: Maybe I would say we share in a way. We do have different cases but there are common -- there's something which is very common. In my case, for instance, the same in Morocco, the same in Jordan, probably in Egypt, there is an ignorance factor that there is not enough awareness about women. The woman does not know her rights and this is really major. Because if you don't know, it means the law does not exist. And even if you change the law and you wouldn't create awareness around this law, the law did not change. So, and this is very common across all the

cases.

MS. WITTES: Marianne.

MS. IBRAHIM: I think the most important thing about networking between women across the region was the feeling of empowerment that we get to have from success stories from other women. This is one thing. And the other is the networking. I remember that I met Manal al-Sharif, and she's the first Saudi woman to drive and I met her through a Vital Voices network. In Egypt we drive. I mean, that's very common, but I was amazed by her strength. And somehow, although the case is totally different, I felt empowered because this woman is standing out and she's doing things in her country and she's acknowledge this is empowering me.

In June, I was here in D.C. and I met another amazing woman from Libya. And she's a lawyer. Libya is right across -- Egypt is just neighboring. I've never met any Libyan women in Egypt before and during the Mubarak-Gaddafi era, Libya was completely closed. And I was surprised how amazing and strong this woman was. She's a lawyer carrying a gun and she's a politician. And although she's just next to -- she's in the neighboring country, I only met her through the Vital Voice network because they support her, they fund her, and they made the connection. This is very important because when you get to know other women from different countries that are similar to your circumstances in our own country you feel very empowered.

I also, a few months ago, we had this debate and we are still having it in Egypt about the constitution, about allowing child marriage. I remember that the Muslim Brothers conducted campaigns performing FGM (female genitalia mutilation) on young girls in the villages and that was outrageous. And one of the stuff that we did is that I went to the network that I have from Vital Voices. I have all their e-mails, and I wrote a petition and I asked them please support this. Please spread the word. We shouldn't --

we shouldn't be silent about what's going on in a small village somewhere in Egypt because it will spread and it will move from one country to another even. So I think that the cross-region networking among women is very important, especially because our region is going through a wave of conservatism that we are at the forefront of this battle. It is our battle as women because we are the first to be affected.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Randa, did you want to add?

MS. NAFFA: Yes. I just wanted to add to what Marianne was saying and I think it wasn't the element of surprise more so than, you know, for example, what happened in Egypt and Tunisia in specific, made us in Jordan become, you know, more cautious and put us on our feet because, you know, it's going, like Marianne was saying, this wave of conservatism is hitting us all in different --

MS. IBRAHIM: It's something that you shouldn't be doing. This is not -- this is what you shouldn't be doing in your country.

MS. NAFFA: Exactly. Because it's an indicator, you know. If you are depriving women from public life, from economic life, it tells you a lot, you know, that reform efforts are not genuine. And progress will not take place at all levels if you -- if we ignore women's issues. So, I mean, we have to be very careful now. We have to work harder. We have to change the conversation and we have to, you know, be there in all fields and to make sure that women's agenda is on the table. So it's a very tough time for all of us because, like I said, if you deprive women from public life, that means, you know, no reform will ever take place in the Arab world.

MS. WITTES: Souad.

MS. SIAOUI: Yeah. So cross cultural, cross regional networking allowed us to learn a lot from each other. And any success of any women of that region is success for us as well because we can see here women leaders at several levels --

economic, political, cultural, social, and others -- and I think it's a good thing. What is surprising is the Arab woman is much more powerful than we ever can expect. She can reach all -- overcome all difficulties and make a lot of success.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Do you want --

MS. NAFFA: I just want to say that even, you know, the efforts that our grandmothers and mothers fought for, we have to be careful to, you know, protect even the rights that we've earned throughout the years because these are at risk at the moment.

MS. WITTES: Right. I mean, I think as Marianne's experience suggests, there are cases where the issue of women's status or women's equality becomes more controversial. It becomes more political, more polarized in an environment of change than it was before.

And Souad, you were telling me that when you began your campaign in FEZ, the government wanted to avoid controversy. They thought, uh-oh, this is a really controversial topic and we don't want to touch it. But then you were able to persuade them that this isn't a political issue; it's a development issue. It's a community issue. How did you do that?

MS. SIAOUI: Yeah. We did that mainly through the mass media. We did a lot of advertising, a lot of interviews on the radio, local radio, TV, social media. So we did that. And making people more aware of the conditions and also we tried to communicate with those authorities using dialogue, and we tried to convince them on this.

Another thing we did which I think also played a great role in this perspective is we had some meetings and some workshops which were mainly for NGOs, for small NGOs, we were training them and they start going to their places and

talk about this. So all these things contribute to the success of the campaign and of convincing the government of the issue. And as I mentioned before, the issue of early marriage and forced marriage was raised before. One known case of the suicide of Amina Filali, which occupied the local and the international media interests.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Okay, let me open it up and we've got about 40 minutes or so for conversation with our audience. Let me ask you a few basic things. Number one, wait for the microphone. Number two, identify yourself before asking your question. And I'll ask you please to make sure that it is a question. And one question.

So why don't we start with this lady here in the green shirt right there. Behind you. Yeah, right there. Sorry.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I want to thank all the panelists for their presentation and the great work that you're doing. My name is Ingi. I'm from Egypt and I'm studying here in the U.S. And my question will be directed to Marianne but all the panelists are welcome to contribute to it.

Definitely with the women's rights in Egypt and also as a woman, I'm concerned about the rights that I have. But I always find that the approach that women's organizations use to demand their rights is very confrontational. They do not try to engage with the governments. They always blame the government while they within them are divided. The same as all the political parties and powers on the ground. For example, the government had the quota, some women rejected it saying that this is unfair and the government should remove the quota. Now they are demanding a quota. When Hijab banned the media, this was against civil rights. When it was allowed in the media, then now the country is being Islamized. So there seems to be a problem within women movements in Egypt and they need to sit and talk and unify their demands first and then try to engage with the government because there are many problems within the

government, but yet they do not seem to be that against women's rights because there was just a piece of news lately that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted 32 new young diplomats, 17 of which are women and the first of the batch is also a woman and 15 are men. So it seems that there could be some support for women's rights if there is a right way to approach the government.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Thank you. So a question about divisions amongst women's organizations, on priorities, and whether there's a half full -- glass half full, glass half empty way of thinking about what's happening in Egypt.

MS. IBRAHIM: Before the revolution, I totally agree with you. There was some kind of a division because the civil side in Egypt is relatively new and young. And old types of approaches and different ideas are completely expected. But now we're talking about this moment when we're writing our constitution, certain movements or initiatives from the government are not -- unfortunately are not enough. At the moment, all types of -- not only women's rights organizations but all types of NGOs are addressing the government, but the problem is that the civil society in Egypt is being excluded from the basic building of the country. We want more than a piece of news about appointing a number of women because the text of the draft of the constitution says something completely different and this constitution is going to last, even after the Minister of Foreign affairs will leave. It could be an individual initiative of a certain ministry, but we're talking here about the basics of the country. The committee that is writing our own constitution, it's 100 members and there are only six women on board. One of them already withdrew because she was objecting to the status of women in the constitution. And if you read the draft, you will find out that we are going backwards and we are fighting for basic women's rights now because all the rights that we achieved -- that women achieved before the revolution are now being considered. Suzanne's rights or

Suzanne's laws as they say, the former first lady because they were signed during Mubarak's era. So the fight is a little bit more than individual initiatives.

I can assure you that the civil societies at the moment right now in Egypt are joining forces because they are feeling really threatened. So does all the non-Islamic political powers. They are trying to join forces as well because they feel threatened, not by Islamic movements but by the Islamic political parties who are now the ruling parties in the country. So I would say the situation is hopeful because we are joining forces now and we are engaging in a lot of negotiation among different points of view among women's rights organizations, try to join forces because we are having a long fight.

MS. WITTES: The gentleman here and then we'll take this lady on the aisle. Right there. Yes.

MR. VALDEZ: Hi. I'm A. C. Valdez. I'm a radio producer for America Abroad on public radio.

I think all of the panelists have pretty much kind of agreed that awareness of the rights that women already have is a pretty significant factor that needs to be addressed. I'm just kind of wondering how can educational opportunities, so that girls and young boys, I guess, too, are aware that these rights exist be improved within your respective countries?

MS. WITTES: Okay. And right behind you. Yeah, right there.

MS. DOHADI: My name is Hannana Dohadi. I'm a graduate student here at American University. Most recently, I was working for a nonprofit in Abu Dhabi, AMIDEAST, which promotes educational opportunities throughout the Middle East. My last project before leaving was working on an entrepreneurship education program for women. And after working with women over several weeks, helping them to prepare business plans and accounts and all sorts of things that they would need to actually start

practically a business, when we got towards the end of the program and we were getting towards implementing all their work, it seemed that for more than half of the women was I have to ask my father first, which sort of led us to a situation where we had put in all this work and they were prepared and well educated about how to start a business, and yet had to seek approval from a male relative in order to implement this. It might just be a classic case in this situation laws working faster than culture. But how do you see us bridging that gap between the lag? We could easily implement a law but how do you change minds and cultures.

MS. WITTES: Good. And I think both of these questions raise the issue of men's role in advancing women's equality and women's empowerment. And I know that a number of you had men who were active in your campaigns as well, so I would love to hear any of you address. Souad, do you want to start?

MS. SIAOUI: So first of all, I would like to mention that the president, the director responsible for our projects is a man. So the projects, our team, is headed by a man. And I think that one of the important characteristics of nonwestern feminism and social movements is that it is not excluding men. Men are all the time there, are all the time supporting women.

And we emphasized the awareness of the population because I cannot imagine life going on smoothly with having conflicts between the two genders. So we should all contribute to the resolution of social problems, males and females. Because when you say early marriage, when you say marriage of a young girl, it's a daughter. It's a sister. It's a mother. Okay. So we have this link so we cannot distinguish between men and women.

As to how we educate women and boys about rights, I think as an educator, as an academic, we have a lot of programs starting from early ages of what

you call civic rights. There are sessions, courses, which educate young children from very early which is something new in our culture, to educate boys and girls about their rights and to make them learn about this.

As to the other population, uneducated population because there are a lot of illiterate people in my country and most of them are women, it is done through radio, through traditional mass media, and also new media. As to changing mentalities, mentalities do not change between today or tomorrow. It needs a lot of time and we need to resist as women activists and human rights advocates we should go and struggle. And I agree with the Egyptian students over there who mentioned that one day we say we have -- we are against the quota and then when we are frustrated with this right we start talking -- asking for the minimum. I think that women's organizations and civil society have to play a great role in this. We should not go back. We should step forward in order to achieve our goals. And I think the results will be great.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Others?

MS. IBRAHIM: About changing the culture, and back to your question, we're not a women's rights organization. And personally, I don't believe that the best approach is a women's organization run by women, targeting women, and talking to women because, I mean, you're singing to your own choir here. I believe more is that engaging men all the time and doing all types of work, there has to be a woman-element in it. So I believe in supporting work done by women targeting the whole society but it's done by women. That would naturalize women's leadership roles in the society.

In our own project we had a staff of 12 and four of them were men. And we did it, as I was saying, intentionally. We sent the male researchers talking to women and we asked them just to listen to what women have to say. It's very important that work on education include the basic human rights and equality in the education, in

primary education for children and for our work including men and support work done by women targeting the whole society.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Lina.

MS. AHMED: I kind of -- I would like to say something on top of what Marianne said. I tend to disagree with the majority that men should support women, men should support empowered women, and all of this type of stereotype talk because we represent half the society and we raised the rest of the half. So basically, the whole society. (Laughter)

MS. WITTES: Just to make that clear.

MS. AHMED: In other words, if the women, the mother, educates her son that, okay, you can go and get your education from London. No, you cannot. You are a girl. You stay at home because you cannot do it. You can't travel by yourself.

Okay, later in (inaudible) you will become (inaudible) and when they address their girls, they address them in a different way. In (inaudible) you will become a teacher. It starts from there. It starts from the mother. It doesn't start from the man because when the son sees his mom as she's empowering him as much as she is empowering his sister, he will empower his wife as much as he will empower his daughter. So I think it starts with the women. From women to women. And frankly, I'm sorry to say that but because this is not the common perception, we used men in our campaign as our marketing strategy because it's perceived like it's anti-feminism. They're more listened to. It's not like a group of women looking for the rights of women but we had to use this strategy although it's not my favorite. (Laughter) But it's the way we needed to market it because this is the common perception.

And for the second question -- the first question, actually, across the region we use the social media. It's very common. It's very powerful. Very impactful.

However, in the rural areas, not only -- it's not only enough because we have created across the region, individually and in each of our countries, an ecosystem of NGOs, organizations, associations in order to also create and enlarge the network of our advocacy case and reach more rural areas. So we have recruited NGOs in rural areas so they can reach the women and talk their language. So we use different strategies.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Randa.

MS. NAFFA: I think also because unfortunately the laws by itself, they also reinforce stereotypical traditions. They reinforce them by either being discriminatory or by either not being implemented or activated just like in our case. So what I think the best tactic to do is to work in parallel to try and change the laws or enforce laws, but at the same time also raise awareness at all levels because if you do one without the other you go nowhere. And I also want to emphasize in our campaign I also didn't agree with the strategy but again, we had to place it in the context of the family because, you know, providing daycare is not only beneficial for the women, it's beneficial for the entire family. And that's reality. And we've seen it in some of the daycares that exist in Jordan. We've seen, you know, management personnel in their suits, you know, carrying their babies and their infants to the daycare. And they all came to our work -- the fathers and the men, the main supporters. Actually one of the lead supporters in our campaign was the secretary general of the Ministry of Labor, who was a male and he brought his family and children to work. So again, I mean, because we placed it in the context of the family and we continued to expose the benefits of having a daycare for the entire family because it reduces pressure on them, it provides more stability at home and at work. It means, you know, less expenses for the family. It increases the income for not only the women, for the entire family. So it keep exposing the benefits, the business benefits for the employer and the benefits for the family and also for the welfare of the society as a whole is

important.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. So it sounds like it's all about building a coalition that is maximally broad. Women and men, all kinds of NGOs with all kinds of missions, as many different political factions as possible as you noted, Lina, in order to get the job done.

Okay. More questions. Sir.

MR. ALTMAN: I'm Fred Altman and I have a naïve question. Culturally, how much is women working outside the home accepted and how is that influenced by the fact that it considerably increases the family income?

MS. WITTES: Okay. And right here in the striped shirt. Yeah. Just wait for the mic.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Kathy (inaudible). I'm an intern at National Endowment for Democracy. And I was wondering I remember in Egypt there was a march for anti-sexual harassment during, you know, because this happens a lot, especially during the revolution. And in response, they did like virginity tests and something like horrible things like this. And I was wondering what kind of other challenges do you guys face like that? Like, you mentioned phone calls constantly. How can you prevent this from happening or encourage women to come out and still protect their rights despite such horrible intimidating and stuff like that?

MS. WITTES: Okay. So, I think -- I suspect that the four of you will have four different answers to Fred's question about norms and cultural practices surrounding women's employment, and then we have a question about how do you mobilize women to come out when they see their bravest colleagues subject to this kind of intimidation? Who wants to start on the women's employment question?

MS. IBRAHIM: Well, I think in Egypt, women in rural areas are more

empowered -- poorer women are more empowered than middle class women because of economical issues. And that's why we can never stress how important economical empowerment is.

When we spoke to rural women through our survey, women -- when we asked them what do you want to see in the constitution, they didn't talk about security or food. They talked about their desire to see a woman as a prime minister or even a president. And when we asked them why they said a woman prime minister would know. She would understand. And we tried to analyze these types of answers, and we discovered that rural women, despite all the traditional strains in rural areas, but their families cannot afford locking them in. So although a lot of fathers desire or husbands to keep their wives or daughters inside and prevent them from work or even education, but in poorer families it's very difficult. They cannot afford keeping them inside. That's why economical empowerment is very important.

Of course, there are a lot of traditions that might prevent women's advancement of their participation in the labor force but it varies from one place to another in Egypt and they are changing and they are easing. It's not as it was maybe 10 years ago because the level of education and the exposure, the media exposure, especially with the internet everywhere, that you cannot prevent from anyone. So it is helping girls and women to develop more.

In answering your question, we are -- in Egypt, sexual harassment is a common problem and it's not directly related to the revolution. It's a plague. It has been there forever. The problem only with the revolution is that there were huge crowds with no security presence and you can never know who is doing what or where. So foreign correspondents or even Egyptian media persons entering the square, it was on their own personal -- they have to watch out because it was not easy and everybody knows that.

Only during the fighting and attacks there was no sexual harassment at all on the square.

Before the revolution, we didn't do anything because civil society or activists, it was very difficult to take the streets for any demands. So basically, girls were advised to cover up. It just didn't work. The public space is much more wide at the moment and we're not being silent about it. That's very important. We are defying the tradition that you're being harassed on the streets because you are dressed differently or because you're not veiled. So when we arrange our campaigns, we make sure that veiled girls are telling their stories to the public. It's very important that when you address the public, you address them from their own point of view. So I want to change the idea that the girls' appearance affects -- it's her fault because she's dressing in a different way so she's being harassed. Now even veiled girls and covered up girls are being harassed, so we're not being silenced about it. We are involving men all the time. This is very important, especially in sexual harassment, even from different strategies that are not approved by many, but we are addressing the protective, macho feelings with Egyptian men. And there was a very popular campaign "Don't harass her, protect her." Although I don't agree with the strategy, but it works. It works. I know, but it works. I don't approve it. I disagree with it, but it worked because it's very important when you work with the public you have to understand the map, the mental map. They're working on the cultural or you will start to be very confrontational and it's not going to work.

So it's not only the anti-sexual harassment marches but actually, the first women only march in Egypt was in March 2011 on the International Women's Day. We were harassed and beaten but we took to the streets the following month and so on until the media is not being silent about it and we are working on making this a social crime. A social crime. So before it was just flirtation, but we made sure to introduce the word "harassment" in Arabic because it's not acceptable and it's actually -- it offends the

harasser. So we are building up against the phenomena and I think soon it's going to bet better.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Did any of the rest of you want to speak, Lina, on women's participation in the workforce?

MS. AHMED: Well, I think it's a big common, like Jordan, we have a high level of educated women. However, the women's participation in the workforce is around 23 percent only, which is very low. And of course, the difference between the rural areas and the cities. In the cities it is, of course, much higher versus the rural areas. Maybe the business opportunities in the rural areas are not as common -- they do not exist in abundance as it does in the big cities because it's more commercial. This is from one side.

From the other side, definitely there is a big economic impact when women work. Definitely they affect the GDP, they affect the inflation rate. There is no doubt about -- it's not rocket science. Unfortunately, I do have the figures how much it does affect and how much it does have an impact in Lebanon but I don't have them at hand now. But definitely there is a big impact. So this is why we need to fight for their rights and create new laws that will facilitate the work environment for women in order to increase their participation in the workforce. Also, we have to work from a sociocultural level whereby we need to educate women that they can do life balance, work-life balance. It can be done.

MS. WITTES: We're still working on that here.

MS. AHMED: I know. I can't remember, a CEO of a major company. She said there's work, there's --

MS. WITTES: Cheryl Sandberg.

MS. AHMED: Yeah.

MS. WITTES: From Facebook. Yes.

MS. AHMED: Yes. Yes. She said there's work, there's balance.

There's nothing called work-life balance.

MS. WITTES: That's right. I always say there's no balance; there's juggling.

Souad.

MS. SIAOUI: Yeah. I would like to answer the gentleman over there saying that in Morocco there are more than 54 percent of families who are bread owners by women. And the mentality has more or less changed than in the past. In the past, in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, till '90s, women's work was not encouraged. But because probably of economic crises and economic reasons, women are more encouraged to work in our country and are given more opportunities and probably will have more workers because if you talk about low income women, women workers, we find that more women accept work with lower income than men. And most of these families have a husband who is jobless, so it is the woman who works and is the owner.

And from the cultural point of view, we have in the past -- I give you the question, the example of marriage, for example. In the past, a man always looks for a woman who stays at home because he is looking for a mother who will be taking care of the children. Nowadays, all men insist and ask for a woman who is working. Okay? Yeah.

MS. WITTES: Did you want to add anything?

MS. NAFFA: Yes, sure. I mean, unfortunately, yes, I mean, despite all the advancement, the expectation of women is to -- it is her responsibility to take care of children and to manage the household. And it's a phenomenon across the globe but it hits us harder in our part of the world. So employment, of course, I mean, you know,

looking at research in Jordan, if women's employment increases then it not only reduces the woman's vulnerability in general, it opens all sorts of choices for women. It allows women to become independent and to make her own choices about, you know, everything in life, to choose her husband, the number of children, all sorts of decisions that are affecting her. So yes, employment, of course, is a major empowerment tool for women.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. I think we have time for maybe one more or maybe two more questions, if we can. Let's see. The young lady here in the polka dot blouse. Yes, right there in the middle.

SPEAKER: Hello. Thank you very much for the work you guys are doing. We need women like you for a better future for women in the world.

My question is related to honor crimes. I was wondering, I'm not familiar with the situation in other countries, but I know that in Jordan the government sometimes imprisons women that are threatening with crime honors. And instead of imprisoning, like, the people that threaten them. So I was just wondering if that situation has changed or if it is still the same. And I also know that they really face like minimal punishments. So I was wondering if the situation has improved.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Gary, here in the front.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. And thank you four very much. I'm Gary Mitchell. I write the Mitchell Report.

I've been listening to this and realizing that we've spent all this time talking about the work that you're doing for obvious reasons, and I've been thinking about how each of you got there. And I wonder to the extent that you're willing to share that information with us, who or what were your inspirations? What led you to do this kind of work? If we were talking to four poets at some point we'd say when did you first become

interested in poetry and when did you first decide that you were a poet? So I'm interested in how you got to this place where you're doing this remarkable work and what inspired you then and now?

MS. WITTES: Gary, thank you. And I think that's maybe a great question on which to wrap up. So Randa, if I can ask you to address the question on honor crimes in Jordan, and then maybe we can go quickly down the row.

MS. NAFFA: Just very short remarks on that. Honor crimes, as you all know, is a phenomena across the globe. It's not only in Jordan. The reason why it was exposed in Jordan is because, you know, as women's rights movement, we were the one who raised the issue and it was the journalist, Rana Hassani, who was the first one to write about it in the Jordan Times. And that was in the late '90s. And from then there was a lot of awareness and there were a lot of changes that took place. Because of this awareness, the government took a lot of action and now the police and especially the judges, because of the training that they've received, they are now actually the, what do you call it?

MS. WITTES: The authority?

SPEAKER: Governance?

MS. NAFFA: The courts.

SPEAKER: Judges.

MS. NAFFA: Rulings have -- are being, you know, I know that it used to be the minimal punishment but now it's being raised as a result of the training that the judges and the police have received throughout the years. So I'll stop there.

On honor crimes, the reason -- I don't know when I got involved. I think it was during childhood years. I don't remember when I was, you know, it was always there, a part of me, and I think part of the reason why is because I was brought up in an

open family and my aunts and my entire family were part of the women's rights movement since the '40s and the '30s, so you know, it just came naturally to me. And that's why I feel responsible that the gains they've achieved throughout the years, I don't want to lose them. I don't want my kids and my children to live in a grimmer period. So that's why I need to work harder and to protect the rights that my grandmother and my mother fought for.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Souad.

MS. SIAOUI: Yes. Unlike Randa, I'm not brought up in a progressive family. I'm brought up in a very conservative family in which I have five brothers and another sister and I'm the eldest. And I have been all the time spoiled as a girl, given whatever I want, but you don't have the same rights as a boy. Yes? When it comes to special issues. And when it comes to this idea of early marriage, I have the case of my mom getting married at the age of 13 and ending up with nine children -- two are dead and seven are alive -- and I see how oppressed she is up till now.

And I started my struggle after marriage, not before, because before marriage, although I was a university professor, I did not have the right to exercise my activism, my political participation. It's only after marriage when I married a medical doctor, a wonderful man who opens all the doors for me and allows me to struggle for all the rights I'm asking for.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Lina.

MS. AHMED: Well, actually, I should say we owe it to MEPI because through MEPI I personally got invited to the U.S. for an entrepreneurship training called -- it's called MEEP U.S., which is Middle East Entrepreneurship Program. So I came to the U.S. and I met one Lebanese lady here in the U.S., and when we got back home we met other Lebanese ladies who underwent the same program for two or three years. And we

got all invited to Tunis for women's association, business women's association, something like that in Tunis, and we realized that Lebanon, although we take pride that it's a liberated country, very well advanced, they say it's the Paris of the Middle East. The Switzerland of the Middle East when it comes to the banking system and the Paris when it comes to the lifestyle.

But what happened is we were shocked that all the other Arab countries, or most of the Arab countries, they had business women associations except for Lebanon. We had one actually but we do not share the same vision. It is a business women's association but they do more social work. So we decided to do our own. And the more we got to know about the potential of women in our region and the existing entrepreneurs in our region and what they've done and the achievements they've done, the more we got inspired about this powerful energy, positive energy that is around. So it just gets to you and you cannot stop. So this is how we started and how we ended.

MS. WITTES: Thank you, Lina. Marianne.

MS. IBRAHIM: For me, I think the first time I started to care about what was going on in my country was in 2005 and it was after a sectarian massacre in North Egypt where there was a lot of violence, a lot of bloodshed in that city against Christians. And I was angry, frustrated, and I didn't know what to do. And I remember I was -- I was just completely outraged and I asked my dad what should I do? And he said stop being angry. Stop being whiny about it. Go out and do something if you want to. And this is how it started.

In 2005, I formed with a group of friends the first dial-up class between Copts and Muslims trying to talk about the stuff at issue or trigger the violence. And I believe that my dad was the first person who believed that I could do more, and he always supported me. He always encouraged me. We are three girls, three sisters, in a

middle class Egyptian family, Coptic Christians. And whoever is familiar with the Copts in Egypt, they are keeping things to themselves. They don't like to go out and care about what's going on in the country. So I guess my dad was the first person who saw the human being in me, not the woman. So whenever I wanted to do something I asked him and he said just go out and forget about what people are saying about you, and whoever stands in your face, just ask them to go to me. My dad was an ex-military. (Laughter) And the first time I tried to travel outside the country and my family was making a big fuss about it but then my dad stood in their face and he said if she wants to do it, she will do it. So I owe him a lot of where I am right now. And that's why I totally believe that the first supporter of a woman in her life would be her dad. Definitely. Definitely.

And then after 2005, I started -- it's just being stubborn. I mean, whenever I find something that I cannot do because I'm a Christian or a woman, I just go ahead and do it and let's see what happens. And that's how I deal with it every day at a time.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Before we close I want to hand the microphone over to the executive director on the Project on Middle East Democracy, Steve McInerney.

MR. McINERNEY: Thanks very much. Thanks, Tamara. Thanks. POMED is really excited to join forces with Brookings and Vital Voices to put on today's event. I think it was a really valuable and important enlightened discussion, not only in providing sort of valuable insight into sort of the struggle for women's empowerment in the region, but also, you know, I was struck by how all of the lessons learned and kind of the issues that you all addressed today are so important for the much broader struggle for democracy and for rights and political participation empowerment of the citizenry across the region, across the Arab world, and not only for women. I think the lessons

that you all discussed about the importance of building broad coalitions of using public engagement and focusing on public awareness to change public policy of learning lessons from each other and from your experience in different countries, these are such valuable lessons that are so important for kind of everyone in the Arab world that's kind of working in this kind of difficult period for change. I think it's also exciting to have this event at a time where a lot of the headlines and discussions in town about the Middle East are focused on violence or radicalization or kind of big picture politics. It's exciting to see some of the most impressive stories of civil society working to affect change in the region. So thanks very much. Thanks to Brookings and Vital Voices. Thanks to all of you for coming and please join me in thanking our excellent panel of speakers.

(Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2012