THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WOMEN IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST:

AN ADDRESS BY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE TARA SONENSHINE

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, April 4, 2013

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good and morning. Welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. Very glad to have you here. I'm Tamara Cofman Wittes, Director of the Center, and I am truly delighted to welcome to our stage this morning Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Tara Sonenshine.

We are here just almost exactly on your one-year anniversary joining the State Department as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. And what we wanted to do today was really have an opportunity to delve into a particular aspect of the sweeping change that's taking place in the Middle East today.

The Arab Awakening has brought tremendous opportunities and openings. It's also brought a great deal of anxiety and questions. And I think on no issue is that mix of hope and anxiety more prevalent than around the status of women -- women's equality, women's empowerment, women's rights -- in the Middle East. And just a week past the end of Women's History Month we thought was a good time to take stock of where things stand, of why this issue is important, and what the United States is doing as part of its broader support for change in the Middle East. What is it doing to support the empowerment and equality of women and girls?

I could not be happier than to have my friend, Under Secretary Tara Sonenshine, here with us to help us address these questions. Tara is a long-time media professional, but she's also somebody who throughout her career has worked on, has written about, has spoken on issues of women's empowerment and women's inclusion here in the United States and in foreign affairs. And she brought that deep concern and commitment to the issue of women's empowerment with her to the State Department.

She is, in her role as Under Secretary, a champion for this issue in American diplomacy, continuing the work laid out by Secretary Clinton and Melanne Verveer, who was Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues.

Tara came to the State Department after a long and distinguished career in media, in strategic communications, and in diplomacy. She was Executive Vice president at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a Communications Advisor to a host of organizations involved in foreign affairs and diplomacy, including the International Crisis Group, InterNews, CARE, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the International Women's Media Foundation.

Many of you may originally have come to know Tara through her work at ABC News, where she had a wonderful career as a producer of *Nightline*, as a reporter at the Pentagon, and also as a contributing editor at *Newsweek*. So Tara has been a public face and a public voice for women in public affairs for many, many years, and I'm really delighted that you are with us this morning, Tara. The podium is yours.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: Well, I want to thank back to you, Tamara, for not only me, but really for so many incarnations that we have worked on projects together. And you continue to be a role model for women and for men in foreign policy, and we thank you and we applaud all you do. So thank you.

Well, I was hoping to start the speech by saying spring has finally arrived, but I'm going to drop that line. But I do wish spring would fully arrive for the women of the Middle East and North Africa. As we meet here this morning, 50 percent of that region's population, many of whom were on the front lines of democratic change in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya; they are denied equal or even remotely equal roles after the revolution.

But fear not. I am not going to deliver the speech you have heard a million times before about the importance of women. No, I think we are moving beyond that speech into what I think of as the post-rhetoric stage of this issue. Instead I want to ask you a few provocative questions. Should we really care about increasing the role of women in the Arab world, I mean, beyond just feeling good about ourselves? If so, why? Really, will the full inclusion of women, practically speaking, politically speaking, economically speaking, is it really going to make a difference amid this uncertain, even chaotic transition? And how we will know what success even looks like?

So let me break it down on the first issue, why care? Yes, fairness and human dignity are universal values. But, you know, I notice we tend to embrace those values very strongly when it comes to talking about, like, the global economy, level playing fields, open rules, fairness, transparency essential so men and women can compete on the basis of their talent and economic drive.

But what about in the broader sense of human rights? This week, former Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton came to the stage at the Kennedy Center, and we were all reminded of her remarks almost 20 years ago in Beijing. Can you believe that was almost 20 years ago? And remember how she put it so memorably, and I quote her, "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights once and for all." Well, once and for all.

There is a common set of liberties to which all human beings are entitled, and, yes, governments must enshrine, protect, and enforce those liberties so everyone is represented, all citizens treated equally under law regardless of creed, color, or gender. But it's almost 20 years later, and what is new to say under the sun?

What's new under the sun is actually a lot of data and research. We now

have an evidence-based reality on this subject. Study after study has confirmed that any country or region that ignores half of its population will undercut its chance of success politically, economically, and democratically. Fact.

Another fact: there are some demographic realities in the Arab world. Young people, including young girls, young people are a disproportionate majority. Youth unemployment is among the highest numbers globally, and I see people shaking their heads because they know and you know that the youth bulge is going to continue until at least 2030. These facts put empowering young people of both genders at the top of every single agenda.

Let's stick with facts here. Young women are the largest cohort in higher education in many countries, in many regions, and they are the next generation of human capital. If we limit that pool of emerging problem-solvers, we will limit unique perspectives, experiences, skills, and solutions. We have to keep citing studies, statistics, and facts.

According to a World Bank study, women in the Arab world have the lowest rates of employment of any region. The economies of the Middle East will never reach their potential without women playing a significantly more active role in the workforce.

Okay, we've done the economics. Let's go beyond economics. Let's talk about extremism. That gets people sitting up higher in their chairs. Women are frequently the ones most intimately connected in the community with families, neighbors. They are uniquely positioned to prevent extremist ideology from creeping in their communities. They are the community's most frequent teachers of respect and tolerance, and they can bring their attributes to more than the so-called women's issues

base. They are good at conflict resolution, economic management of a household income, and political leadership.

All across the region we're seeing women taking the initiative, women like Tawakul Karman, now a 34-year-old mother of three from Yemen, a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for nonviolent efforts to enhance women's safety, human rights, and peace building; the UAE, Minister of Development, and international cooperation, Lubna Al Qasimi; scientists like Dr. Ansam Sawalha, who has a science camp, Go Girls, bringing educational opportunities and scholarships to girls and women in the Palestinian territories.

Can you please help imagine an entire region if the Tawakuls, the Lubnas, the Ansams, are no longer just a short list of individual exceptions, but regular citizens building infrastructures, democracy, freedom, dignity, prosperity, and innovation? It is essential in today's Arab world that women actually govern.

In Yemen, you could say that 28 percent of the delegates of the National Dialogue are women, but the truth is, they hold very few of the real decision making seats. Women only have three out of 72 seats in the new Syrian opposition coalition. Egypt -- Egypt, historic, important Egypt. The abuse of women has violated not only bodies, but rights to free expression and the right to fully take part in their country's transition. Only about nine women legislators won seats in the parliamentary elections, and it has been left often to women in civil society -- women like the National Council of Women -- to stand up against official pronouncements that distort religion and deny rights to women.

There is also what is frustrating to many of us, an internal conundrum about all this. What's the conundrum? Women are needed in decision making circles to

bring about political change, but until there is political change, women have difficulty attaining influential political positions.

I hope what I am doing for you is helping you to help women who are finding their voice to build the strongest and possible solid case for their inclusion, because the evidence could not be more clear cut. Women are the bellwether, the barometer, and the building bricks of greater economics, democracies, and countries. So, yes, we should care because they care, and because they and us are in charge of building a safer and more secure world.

There's another reason we should care and the women out there in these countries care. We should care because when we stop caring, when we stop talking about it, governments and economies backslide. Women are sidelined, further marginalized, and there is and can be retreat. And here's what happens when there's retreat on these issues: failed expectations, violence, suppression of rights -- everyone's rights. The cost of systemic discrimination and a failure to harness the contributions of women will have consequences for prosperity, stability, and violent extremism.

Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to sit with 16 young women from the Middle East and North Africa. They were here on a State Department International Visitors Leaders Program. They had come to the United States to meet with other American entrepreneurs, and networks, and government civil society folks. You got to look at their faces and at their resumes: parliamentarians, members of civil society, professors, doctors, election monitors. And they're in the trenches of pushback hostility and institutionalized resistance. And they asked me to tell you, they do not believe in retreat.

The women from Egypt were particularly moving in laying out for me their

challenges. They talked about teargas. They told me they experience it almost every day. They told me that teargas comes in different colors. Sometimes, they said, it's the kind that burns your skin or takes your breath away. One woman joked, I think we're getting addicted to it.

What they didn't joke about was horrific rape and sexual violence in their own country. I didn't ask them to describe how it happens. They asked if I would listen to how it happens. They described how during a demonstration, men surround women like a pack of football players in a huddle, and one by one they take turns raping.

We're following these developments in Egypt very closely, no more so than Secretary Kerry, who has shown a commitment to these issues throughout 30 years in the Senate. He vowed at his confirmation hearing to carry forward Secretary Clinton's work to institutionalize women and girls and make them the center of American foreign policy. And he said this week, and I quote, "President Obama and this Administration share real concerns about the direction that Egypt appears to be moving in. But it's our hope that there is still time to turn the corner. But the recent arrests, the violence in the streets, the lack of inclusivity with respect to the opposition in public ways that make a difference to all people in Egypt, that is a concern today." So as we condemn attacks everywhere in the world and urge governments to prosecute those responsible, we recognize the sexual violence is endemic across societies, not only in Egypt, not only in this region, in many parts of the world, and not only in cities, but in rural communities.

Well, let's not have fully a downer day here. I'm pleased to note that many of the 16 women also shared some good news stories. One Moroccan woman told me she is the youngest female parliamentarian in Morocco. She looked about 12, but I'm sure she was not 12. She was the first girl in her village to go to school to attend a

university to become elected to public office. She said she's determined to make sure her exceptional story becomes every Moroccan girl's "normal story."

Another woman from Iran escaped from her country during the green movement demonstrations and the regime crackdown, and she's working to reach out to other women to produce democratic change. I heard stories of transforming societies, echoed by women like the Minister of Social Affairs in Sudan, who's working to protect children, the legislator from Iraq who said she's fighting for the widowed women and the disabled, a Palestinian woman working on higher education. And there was something unanimous in all their stories, something they all agreed on: we want freedom and, most of all, we want dignity.

So it was interesting that words mean things to these women. You have to be very careful with word choice. I said to them that I prefer now to talk about the gender space, not so much the women space. It just seems like we're beyond a space in a corner. Oh, no, they said. Oh, no. No. They're not ready to take that word "women" out of the lexicon. They want us to continue to talk about women and to make sure women are not sidelined, abused, or marginalized.

They told me that women are the keys. They want free, fair, and transparent economies, enhanced security, rights for women and girls to go to school. They want our civil society, our foundations, and our government to promote, change, to integrate them into peace and security building. They want us to share lessons on preventing gender-based violence. And they want us to do more to increase their civil societies.

What I'm focused on in this job, and I hope to chat more with you about, is trying to stitch together all that we do in the U.S. government and the whole of

community. How do you put it all into some comprehensive tapestry to show what we're doing to support societies and to create outcomes that we can measure? I mean, we do so much, but at times it's so disparate. We work in the Middle East and Northern Africa. We joined the G8 ministers at the Forum for the Future in Tunisia. We committed to progress on gender equality. We have a robust Middle East partnership initiative, MEPI, an Arab Women's Leadership Institute. We're training officials. We're training journalists. We're training lawyers. We are doing so much. Our embassies, they're out there every single day meeting with women, leading workshops, trying to help displaced persons in Iraq, mentoring Libyans after the democracy elections, training leaders from Rabat to Riyadh.

How do you make all that echo and be real? We have an office, Special Representative to Muslim communities, creating networks of change makers, an Office of Global Women's Issues. We have a community of democracies, a Women in Public Service Project. It feels almost endless. How do we explain that it all matters because it all mentors emerging leaders in powerful ways?

I want to leave you with a couple of stories. A young woman from Morocco now spearheads human rights for a Swiss civil society organization in her country. Another woman wants you to know she's now a political advisor in the Iraqi government. And a Libyan woman wants you to know that she's joined the education ministry, that she's heard our call for female representation in parliament and education. And of course we have all the programs of my area, ECA, CSCC, the Alphabet Soup, our Fortune Program with Global Women's Mentoring, our sports, film, arts, culture, tech women, tech girls. I could go on and on.

So how do we know it all works in the end? Well, you have to track the

graduates of all these programs. What do they end up doing? What do Fulbright women end up doing? What do tech women end up doing? Well, graduates of the program have started to share their data and experience. Two women, who asked that I refer to them only as Fatma and Nadia, are out in Yemen today teaching technology to poor students who've never seen a computer. Stories like these give us confidence, and evidence, and incremental progress.

Thank you to the efforts of women in civil society, all of you. Thank you for helping on Tunisia, removing the objection and removing what was the convention on the eliminating of all forms of discrimination against women, helping navigate that and getting into Tunisia's draft constitution something that affirms women as equal rather than complementary.

Thank you for the work you're all doing to help us on humanitarian assistance in Syria. It is challenging to work in Syria and in the refugee camps. But we are working with the local coordinating committees inside Syria to mobilize nonviolent activists.

So where are we at the end of the day? We're making gains, footholds, toeholds, and it is important to remember the progress which seemed so unimaginable years ago, and remember our own history. Remember our American suffragette, Susan b. Anthony, who once wrote, and I quote, "The women of this nation in 1876 have greater cause for discontent, rebellion, and revolution than the men of 1776." 1876, 100 years after our democratic revolution, 50 years before women got the vote, and we still had decades of work to secure rights for people of every creed, color, and gender.

So it's inevitable. Building a democracy takes time, but please don't stop talking about it. Don't stop pushing. Don't stop working for women in this region. They

want our help. They seek our help. They need our help. And women's rights aren't just rights. They're necessary. Countries all over this world will be stronger when everyone has a stake in the global system.

So it is about success. We are going to plant these habits of democracy into the soil of every region, and then maybe our spring will bloom and a real Arab Spring will bloom alongside it.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

MS. WITTES: Tara, thank you so much. You put a lot out on the table for us and a lot of wonderful stories from the women that you've spoken with across the Middle East.

Perhaps let me start with something that was a much discussed aspect of the Arab Awakening that can have both positive and negative impacts, but an issue that I know you're very involved with, which is technology. Technology is thought to be a tool for empowerment. Certainly when you think about women in traditional societies or societies that face barriers to women's public participation, technology can be a way of breaching those barriers.

I wonder if you can give us a little bit of a sense of the way the U.S. government is using technology to reach out to women in the Middle East.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: Well, in the last 24 hours, I think some of you may have seen technology in action. Let me answer the question broadly and then give you some specifics.

A year ago when I came in, I understood that Secretary Clinton and now certainly Secretary Kerry are committed to what is called 21st century statecraft, the marriage of technology and policy. And so I knew coming in we were going to be a State

Department in the midst of tweets, blogs, Facebook, Google hangouts, e-chats, virtual exchanges. There was just a conversation going on in the world, and our Secretary of State, previous and current, want us out there in those conversations. But those conversations happen very quickly. Policy sometimes happens very slowly.

So one of the challenges is matching the time frames. And so I think as we pursue this, and others may be more interested in the specific cases of when those timelines sync up and when they don't. But this technology is both useful in conveying who you are, what you are, what you stand for, what your values are. This technology is useful in hearing from people about what they think is important, what they need. And the technology is useful in creating dialogues, online education, online training, virtual exchanges, English language teaching in a mobile phone.

So what I always say is the technology is not good or bad. In the end, it's somebody's judgment. It's just a piece of equipment. But what you do with it, ah, therein lies the power.

MS. WITTES: It's also interesting because, of course, we think of diplomacy as something that's very carefully managed, every word weighed. And in a 21st century high tech environment, it's often impossible to weigh every word if you're going to try and engage in that manner. So there's a certain degree of risk that naturally comes along with embracing these tools.

And I think one of the things I found interesting when I was at the State Department, and I'm sure you confront every day, is how you embrace that risk and live with that risk.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: You know, it's interesting because as a recovering journalist, I know that people love to focus on two things. One,

journalists love stories about media, and they also love when things go wrong. And so in the hundreds of tweets and Facebook pages that in the last year I've seen built, created, disseminated, distributed, people have gone out from embassies. And for the most part, for hundreds and thousands of bits of information it's gone well. On a couple of occasions, it's not, and no surprise, feeding frenzy by folks focusing on, oh, this looked like a glitch between this tweet and that twitter. And some of it can, as we know, go viral and be very serious. So it's a no joke area.

But we are encouraged and encouraging people at embassies to be out there, that you cannot hide under your desk or under your computer because the conversation is going on around you.

MS. WITTES: And in a way, even when there are bobbles, it's an opportunity to engage honestly, right? Sometimes the most important diplomacy is not going to be the stuff that's carefully managed. It's going to be the stuff that breaks out.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: And if it goes wrong, what I encourage officials all the time is own it. If it was a glitch, say it was a glitch. I think the worst thing is when you try to craft an answer that's non-glitchy and that might be glitzy, but what you really just want to say is that was an oops.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. I think when we talk about having an honest conversation; you were honest and very outspoken in your remarks about sexual violence. And this is an issue that's tough to talk about. It's tough to talk about in societies that embrace traditional values, and it's tough to talk about in these societies in the Arab world that are undergoing change because the stakes are seen as so high.

Now I remember during the Egypt revolution, women participating in protests was an important signal, not only to other women and families, but to men. If

there are women at the demonstration, you know, that means this is a big deal, and I should be there, too. To some people, to see women at a demonstration meant that it was safe. But I also remember talking to Tawakul Karman last year about her leadership of the demonstrations in Yemen, and she said it was almost a way of shaming the men and saying, well, we're out here risking it, so where are you.

It brings to mind, though, a question of whether some of the sexual violence that we've seen in Egypt is a way not only of pushing women out of the public sphere, but of trying to suppress public protest as a whole.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: You know, a couple of points that I learned in the course of talking to so many people from this region that, first, it's not only women who are raped or violated. Men and boys can experience the same thing, certainly not in the same numbers. Secondly, there's still some taboos, which is what you were alluding to. The hardest thing is to get men and women to talk about these sexual issues of sexual violence of rape, and it's not just the Arab world. I was recently in Delhi shortly after the terrible bus incident, and I was with young people at our American Center in Delhi, and teenage and early 20s boys and girls. And I asked them what they'd like to talk about, and they said, can we talk about the rape incident?

And first I was surprised, but, secondly, they said, we have trouble talking about this at home with our parents and grandparents. And we're not really sometimes sure where the lines are. The young boys in particular said, you know, it's just not a comfortable subject at home or in school.

So unless we get dialogue going -- you know, we're sometimes focused on changing laws and legislation, and training police officers, and reporting of rapes and implementation, and sometimes it's getting young people to have a conversation where

they can express their own confusion about where lines are, and what's allowed, and what it means. So I think promoting dialogue is one of the most powerful tools of public diplomacy to wrestle with hard issues.

And lastly I would say sometimes the best place to wrestle with those issues in the theater, on stage, in reading of a drama, in a film, in a television show. So we have to be creative about how to have those conversations.

MS. WITTES: And those are tools that you have at your disposal as well.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: We do.

MS. WITTES: Now before the event today, we solicited some questions from our audience not only here in Washington, but around the world, and we invited people to submit questions on our website. So I have a couple of those I'd like to share with you. One that came in from California is about tradition and being progressive. And basically through the ages, why haven't women and progressive men been more successful at modernizing traditionally male-dominant societies.

Now you referred in your remarks, of course, to a long struggle here in the United States with changing our social norms and traditions. So is this about progressivism and culture, or is this about rights?

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: No. I'm going to borrow from Joe Biden here. Some of us got to hear Vice President Biden as a vice president and a man speak to this issue the other night at the Vital Voices Conference. And he said that part of why this has taken so long is there are great movements in every century. There are great struggles that dominate the conversation. And he referred back to in our country, it was the Civil Rights Movement that really captivated and swept the United

States in a real conversation about civil rights. Then you got into sort of the 20th century, and world wars, and totalitarianism, and fascism. Those were big, big conversations.

He believes, I believe, I think a lot of us believe, that this gender equality issue is going to be this century's conversation. It has made its way slowly to the forefront. I think what Secretary Clinton did by insisting that it be part of American foreign policy, institutionalizing an office for it. You need to galvanize people. It can't be a little bit here and there. When it starts to get traction, it's a gigantic conversation. It's a speech at Brookings with men and women and people from across disciplines, and C-SPAN covering it. Then you know it's part of the foreign policy conversation.

But it takes moving it from the periphery to being right out there in your face every single day. And I think this one is catching on, and it will be about laws, and we'll argue about culture, and we'll argue about tradition and what's a progressive, and what's a feminist, and what's a woman issue, and what's a gender issue. And that's all great. But it means we're having the conversation.

MS. WITTES: We're having the conversation. And so the point is that everyone should have the ability to have a seat at the table there, whether they have a traditional perspective, a religious perspective, progressive perspective, whatever label you put on it.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: Absolutely.

MS. WITTES: Well, I think that takes us to another question that came in over the web, which is that what do you say to the many women in these countries who support a more Islamic version of women's rules?

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: It's a great question. You know, the research actually when you look across political parties, religions, social movements,

what's really interesting is you can't classify anything as purely progressive on women or not. In other words, you can't say, all Islamist parties agree that on women, X, Y, Z.

So I'm convinced that we have to do this by the old words and deeds test, not by what your party label is or your political group. Do you espouse violence? You either do or you don't. Do you think women are equal to men without qualification? You either do or you don't, and your laws and your actions are going to flow from that. And that to me is a better way to cut at this and saying do you believe in this book or in this political ideology.

This one, it becomes pretty obvious when you don't believe in women's rights. It's really not hard to tell. There's certain activities that happen. And so I don't think we'd want to get trapped into those boxes.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Let me open it up to some questions from the audience. And as usual, I will ask you two things. First, please identify yourself before you ask your question, and, second, please keep it brief and make sure it's a question. Why don't we start here in the front row with Mohamed El Shinawi?

MR. EL SHINAWI: Mohamed El Shinawi, Voice of America. Thank you for your presentation, which you shared with us the challenges facing women within the Arab Awakening. But what's needed to be known is what could the United States do in terms of combating the decline in human rights and women's rights without having the perception of interfering with the internal affairs of the Arab countries. Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: Most important question: how do we not appear to be teaching, preaching, imposing, projecting, demanding, insisting, because those are the wrong terms? What we do, and MEPI is such a great example of it, is you reverse the paradigm and you support the local indigenous voices: the activities,

the civil society organization, the NGOs. You let the local voices carry the day, because those local women, they know what they want, and they don't want to be raped, and they don't want to be insulted, and they don't want to be marginalized. But they don't necessarily have the platforms, the voices, the resources, the means of moving the meter.

So I think we have to work through that. There are certain things that we have to do as a country. In the case of Egypt, there are urgent needs that are also people's needs. They need wheat. They need to eat. They need fuel. So we can't just not meet the urgent needs of a society from a governmental level. But from a public diplomacy level, we have all these actors on the international stage: business, journalists, NGOs, foundations, cultural people, artists. They can be amplifiers, and I think we have to support them.

MS. WITTES: You know, Mohamed, when I took over the MEPI Program in 2009, it had four pillars, and one was the women's pillar. And one of the things that we did while I was at MEPI is we eliminated the women's pillar. Why? Because I wanted to integrate women's empowerment across all of our areas of programming. I didn't see it as a stand-alone priority, because if you take seriously the notion that women's inclusion is essential to economic success, political success, security, then you have to integrate it, and you can't treat it as a stand-alone issue.

I remember, too, being in Kuwait and meeting with a young woman who was in law school. And she had come from a very traditional family in a rural area. And it had taken her two years to persuade her father to let her go to law school. And I remember thinking to myself, that's her battle. I can't persuade her father to let her go to school. Her struggle is to persuade her father, but my struggle is to make sure that when

her family gets to that point where they've evolved in their conversation and he's willing to let her go, that she has opportunities to go, and that she has opportunities to be successful as a lawyer.

And so, you know, I think we can all understand our roles, but we can understand them best when we do that listening and we really get inside the challenges within each society, within each community, so that the work that the State Department does or that NGOs do is responsive to the actual battles that individuals are fighting every day at home.

Let's see, right here in the navy blazer? Yeah. Yeah -- well, that's okay. We'll do two, yeah.

MR. ALTMAN: Okay. Hi. I'm Fred Altman, and my question is, from the State Department's activities, what can we do to influence the men because the men are the ones who are having the problem. Supporting the women and bringing them is great, but the thing we really have to change it the men's behavior.

MS. WITTES: Okay. And then a couple of rows behind him. Yes, right there.

MS. ALDA: Hi. My name is Ala Alda. I work with Booz, Allen, Hamilton, so I've worked extensively throughout the government. Actually my question follows on a lot of -- the two questions that were asked before.

So one of the points you brought up extensively was the fact that women are at the core of society, and they work, you know, through their communities, the connections they have through their families. They have a real influence on a lot that's going on, whether it's counter terrorism or whether it's just development of the society and integrating women more into society.

So one thing I want to ask, how do you think that we can better integrate women who don't have support from, whether it's the families, or the husbands, or the community in general, through their daily interactions, whether it's taking their kids to school, interacting with the schools, whether it's working with other women in their communities. How can we speak to them about making a difference in their community without really changing what they're doing in their daily lives?

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: So both are wonderful questions. And firstly, I love the fact that you're here, Fred. I'm glad you're here because these audiences used to be really 80 percent women, 90 percent women. That's really changed. So the first thing is that men are participating because, as I love to look at that word "women," men are in it literally. They're in the word, so they have to be in the conversation.

And I do think as these conversations expand and we go around and I go around the country, universities are the best place for me to have these conversations because you have people who haven't yet graduated. They're going out into the workplace. Their whole sense that they'll have different expectations, that the work they're going to do overseas is going to be with a mindset around these issues.

And I think even backing up to the younger grades, we have to have boys and girls talking about these issues earlier. It's hard. It's hard to do it at your kitchen table. It's hard to do it in your classroom. But this is where it begins. And so I think it's just absolutely marvelous that we can have these conversations.

In terms of those who aren't quite connected, not every woman in a rural village who's trying to raise six kids is online doing a virtual program. And so part of what we're also trying to do is move these programs out and make them mobile. We have

some American spaces which tell you about some of the work and the things that are available, and they're on wheels.

You literally have to move around the country and get into a village and respect in Afghanistan what a village has as its codes of conduct. But you have to go with that universal sense that there are certain universal rights of expression, rights under the law, rights that come with just human dignity and freedom, the right to information.

In the end, what I'd say is all of this really is about information first. Information, in my way of thinking, is oxygen. It is the way a society breathes. And if you're cut off from information, you are cut off.

And so I think part of it is information, and projects, and programs, and initiatives, and resources, and pulling together government and non-government, and making this a central part of our international policy.

So thank you for the opportunity to be with all of you. Thank you, Brookings, for having me. And I hope we'll keep going.

MS. WITTES: Tara, thank you so much for being with us, and thank you for all the work you do.

UNDER SECRETARY SONENSHINE: Thank you.

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

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)

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Expires: November 30, 2016