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**PLENARY II: "POLITICS DEMONIZES, CULTURE HUMANIZES": ARTS, CONFLICT,  
AND SECURITY**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. SCHNEIDER: Let me introduce myself. I'm Cynthia Schneider, and I've had the great pleasure, since 2006, of leading the Arts and Culture Leaders Working Group at the Brookings Institution, the Saban Center. And we have convened every year in one form or another at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum, and I really have to express my gratitude to Brookings, and in particular to Martin Indyk, who's been a great supporter of this project from the very beginning, to the Doris Duke Foundation, who initially funded our efforts and funded the white papers that I've written for Brookings on arts and culture in the U.S.-Islamic world relationship, and also, all of the people who've come to Doha and become part of a really large network of connected American and cultural leaders from all over Muslim majority communities.

The project has evolved from a focus initially on how culture can increase understanding and bridge the so-called gap between the U.S. and the broader Islamic world, but it's evolved now to, I think, a deeper look at connections between culture and politics in Muslim majority countries. And that's what we're going to focus on today.

And I am fortunate to have a fantastic group of panelists who are going to take us on a world tour of challenging countries, challenging issues, and we're going to look at how culture is interacting with politics and how culture is a really important change agent in these countries. I am going --

And let me just briefly introduce my panelists. You all have longer bios for them, so I'm not going to do this at length. I have Manny Aly Ansar on my left, who comes to us from Mali. Manny is the creator and organizer of the renowned Festival au Désert, a huge music and cultural festival that attracts people from all over Africa, and

indeed, all over the world. Currently, he has been expelled from Mali by the extremists and is organizing the Festival in Exile, which will tour in this year and hopefully, return to Mali in January of 2014. So we'll talk about music under threat in Mali with him.

Next to him is Sultana Siddiqui, who is the CEO of multiple television stations in Pakistan, including Hum TV, and she has really originated dramas on television that address social issues, and we'll talk about how that affects society and politics in Pakistan.

And to her left is Nikahang Kowsar from Iran, now resident in the United States; resident in the United States because he had to flee his country, Iran, because of the death threats he received as a result of his political cartoons. So we'll talk about the really quintessential picture that's worth a thousand words. And before we leave here, I promise you, you will see how each one of you has a potential future as a political cartoonist, thanks to a brilliant new app that Nick is developing.

Now, I want to begin with a brief film that will introduce you to this extraordinary Festival au Désert in Mali, and the current perilous condition that it faces. Can we begin with the film, please?

(Video played.)

MS. SCHNEIDER: Manny, that gives us just the slightest glimpse of the Festival au Désert. Can you elaborate, first of all, for us on the festival itself? How many people come, where they come from, and also the theme of the festival of peace?

MR. ALY ANSAR: As its name says, Festival in the Désert is a festival organized in the desert of Mali, the north of Mali in Timbuktu, and it's like a modern festival with a modern stage, but the audience came -- or many nomadic people came here with colors, and an international audience inviting artists from all over the world and

local artists. And this festival was born after the first rebellion in Mali where we had war in Mali.

And we had the (French). How should I say it?

MS. SCHNEIDER: Le.

MR. ALY ANSAR: (French).

MS. SCHNEIDER: Oh, the peace accords were made.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Exactly.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So their peace agreement was made.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Right. And it was to celebrate this peace agreement for coming back of the -- excuse my English, the coming back of the peace --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Mm-hmm. The return of peace --

MR. ALY ANSAR: And yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- after the war. Uh-huh.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes. It is because during the war, for people it's just not possible to go to Timbuktu, to go to the north of Mali because of the war. But this festival invites people to come to visit Mali, to visit the north of Mali and to celebrate peace. This is the origin of this festival, to open our culture. We are nomadic people in the deep desert. So we said we will open our culture to the rest of the world.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Mm-hmm. Now, you know, I think in every country, we're used to music festivals, people of my generation. I'm going to reveal something here. Remember, I was of course far too young to attend, but nonetheless remember the famous Woodstock festival that was such a signal event, and I think it's a little hard to understand the centrality, the importance of music in Mali; how this is much more than just a nice place to go and hear music.

And one signal of the importance of music for society there is the fact that the extremists who invaded your country, immediately targeted the musicians and the artists and forced you to leave the country. And certainly, and still have not permitted you to return to the north of the country. So, we have this I think kind of strange situation where the extremists recognized the importance of music and the historical manuscripts and historical buildings, as well.

Can you help us in this audience, who want to support the return of peace and democracy to Mali -- can you help us understand the importance of music?

MR. ALY ANSAR: As Bono said here in this film, Mali music is considered as the origin of the American blues. And in Mali especially, music is very, very important in our daily life. We have in Mali what you call a griot, the music teller and the history teller. Our history is tell us (sic) through music. Our tradition -- through music, we know how is good or not good to do.

So they did not have a kind of freedom for speech. They can -- it's actually like the press in the modern world, but they are allowed to say everything to speak to the chief, to speak to woman, to speak to say everyone. To say, this is not good. This is good. And if you did your (inaudible) they will tell it to you.

It's really a kind of regulation of daily life. Of course, music has --

MS. SCHNEIDER: So, let me just interrupt you to say, so the freedom of speech, the way people express their complaints or their concerns about things going wrong in society or in politics, this is through music?

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes, it's through music. It's through griot.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Through the griot?

MR. ALY ANSAR: The griot is a kind of cast -- for kind of cast in

music where the freedom of speech. I can say they did it through music. Sometimes it's comedy, it's drama. But they tell it heartily, and everyone knows who is targeted. Sometimes it is the chief. Sometimes it is the president of the ministry or so on, is targeted by the artist. So, he knows what he did wrong and what he has to do.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So almost, the griot, or those traditional praise singers, then they're almost like living cartoonists. Like what Nick does on paper, they're doing in real life through their songs, which also involves performance. So with the griot, with the music, you have number one, the passing down of history and stories, and also, the discussion of current events, of what's going on.

And also, this is something new I didn't know before, that this is where the dissent comes out. This is where the criticism -- this is how government is held accountable.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Exactly.

MS. SCHNEIDER: And so now, when music is -- and of course, you have your very famous hip-hop singer who does that particularly, but you're saying all the griot do that, as well. Now, when music is banned, what does that mean? What is that like, then?

MR. ALY ANSAR: Of course, as music is so important in our society, when this famous group came to Timbuktu, the first decision -- one of the first decisions we will take is to say no more music, even history music. So it's really how you say, un catastrophe.

MS. SCHNEIDER: A catastrophe, yes.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes. It's a catastrophe to lose.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So it's impossible to imagine society there, because everything -- it's really the life bulb -- blood of society. Everything travels through music.

MR. ALY ANSAR: And of course, artists have to leave. They have to leave this part of the country to go abroad, to go to Bamako, the capital city, because they're there, and their (inaudible).

MS. SCHNEIDER: So it's not safe for them to live in the area where they normally live, and they have to move down to the capital. So they're uprooted from their own environment. Now --

MR. ALY ANSAR: He did --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Sorry, go ahead.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Excuse me. The strength of our society is that they had to chase the musicians in order to implement their politics.

MS. SCHNEIDER: It is the idea that -- did fundamentalists, extremists, totalitarians, and of course, it's not just in Muslim majority countries -- Paul Pott did the same thing in Cambodia. When they want to impose this extreme authoritarian rule and have total control over their citizens, total subjugation, they take away their cultural roots. They take away the lifeblood, the membrane of society. So for them, it's not -- music is not some frivolous thing. It's really the enemy. They can't achieve their goal if music exists.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes, this is true, also, for the destruction of religious sites, because through the destruction of religious sites, they can implement their own politics and policies. So they want to destroy the foundations of the society. They want to destroy the religious sites, the religious statues. And this is why they do all of this, to implement their own beliefs.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- destroy all the history, the mosques the manuscripts, the great, incredible repository of the evidence of the great Islamic civilization in Timbuktu in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. They have to destroy all that and destroy the roots of the people, and then the people have no foundation, no grounding, and they can be completely controlled.

It's interesting to think what is the reverse of that, then. You know? If it's essential for a fundamentalist extremist regime to take control of the people, then you know, in reverse, for a healthy, democratic, tolerant, open society, then you have to be connected to your history and be connected to your culture, and be able to practice it on a regular basis. Interestingly, you know, I'll just end with this last question to you, Manny.

The goal of the international community, particularly the French, who were so active in really coming to the rescue of Mali, but of the United States also, I think the goal is to have elections; that there is now a caretaker government, and I don't think anyone thinks it's a particularly strong government. So the goal is to have elections, which sounds on the face of it like a good idea. Get a democratically elected leader.

But I would ask you this question. If the country is not safe yet for you and your musicians to return to your home in the north, is the country safe for elections?

MR. ALY ANSAR: Before I talk about the election, I would like to talk about our resistance as a musician, as a Malian against this -- so the artists in Mali resisted, and they left, but we continued through playing the music through festivals, through the world, and they were called Festivals in Exile. So even --

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- which is after all, the origin of so much of the music that we know --

MR. ALY ANSAR: Mm-hmm.



MS. SCHNEIDER: -- blues, a lot of rock, Afro pop, all this music originates from there. So you continued to play that, traveling in Europe, in other locations, keeping the traditions alive.

MR. ALY ANSAR: It's true. The international community is now helping Mali to face this crisis, this situation. It is helping Mali to establish a legitimate government, to organize elections. However, the country has been totally destroyed.

We are facing a paradox. From one side, we are saying that we should organize elections and hold elections too, from a government. But from the other side, we are in a country where a large number of the population is displaced, a large number has no houses, especially after the liberation by the French Army. So there is a void that should be filled in order to bring back the population, to establish security and hold peaceful and calm elections.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- that it's unclear whether it has its own internal strength and its own internal systems in place enough to really hold a legitimate election. So, we'll see. We have lots of people here who know about this, so we'll look forward to questions about this and further questions, I'm sure, about you and your future.

Let me go down the line now to Sultana Siddiqui. Sultana is really a living legend. She's the only female CEO of a media -- I'm not going to say a media station, I'm going to say a media empire in Pakistan, which is not an easy environment. Why don't we start with that? Talk about what it is like to be a female CEO in the very contentious, challenging world of media in Pakistan. That is not an easy ring to be fighting in.

How did you get started, and what was that like? And then, we'll go on to what you do in your stations.

MS. SIDDIQUI: Thank you, Cynthia. First of all, salaam alaykum, and I must thank this forum, the U.S.-Islamic World Forum. And up here is the ministry of Poland. They gave us this opportunity and this platform to convey our feelings and to listen to such nice participants daily.

As Cynthia says, it is very difficult in Pakistan -- a woman being a head. Actually, by profession, I was a director and producer of television. In Pakistan, there was only one television station. That was a government Taliban Pakistani television station, and I started my career from there. And then, after that, I was doing a lot of work and I started my private channel with the permission of Pakistan television. And that was the first production house called Moment.

And after 20 years of serving in Pakistan television, I told them that I am leaving. I took an early retirement, and I started my own work. And I thought that we should open a channel, because at that time, Pervez Musharraf came, and he give the permission of private channels. So, did --

MS. SCHNEIDER: So that was the first time in the --

MS. SIDDIQUI: First time.

MS. SCHNEIDER: In the time of Musharraf --

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yes. So, it was --

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- that there was independent, non-state TV?

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yeah. In building, there were two, three channels, and I also thought that I should also come, because this is my profession, and I know these things. But as you said, that this is not very easy, because if a woman wants to work, she has to prove herself twice than a man. So, we have to work.

So I started this channel, and when I was starting this channel, there

were a lot of people that were against -- that she should not open the channel. And they -- one media tycoon came to me and said, Why you are opening this channel in such a -- this society? I think you cannot survive. And he said it politely, but I understood what he wanted to say. But I said no, I have decided, and I will start.

He said, I will take every production from your production house and you don't open the channel. But I did, and it is going very successful. And we have now 58 to 60 channels in Pakistan. But my channel --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Is a --

MS. SIDDIQUI: -- is the only channel which is public listed channel, and it's very beneficial. We give dividends to about -- regularly to our shareholders.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Anyone looking for an investment?

MS. SIDDIQUI: So yeah.

MS. SCHNEIDER: This is clearly investment advice, as well.

MS. SIDDIQUI: So now it's on top, and especially in programming, it is the number one channel nowadays. And it's very popular not -- it's a light channel. We have --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Now, sometimes I'm going to interrupt you and ask you to talk very specifically about some of your programming. I'd like to hear particularly about -- I know for you, not surprisingly, with your own life story, emphasizing themes of women's empowerment is important, and also, addressing problems and issues in Pakistan's society. And I believe that is something that really is your specialty.

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Taking on issues, but not taking on issues in a news show, but taking on issues in a drama --

MS. SIDDIQUI: For sure.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- which is something the United States, for example -- and not only, but for example, is familiar with. You know, we know we have programs such as "Will and Grace," which helped pave the way for the acceptance of same sex marriage and same sex relationships way back. We have the "Cosby Show" which paved the way for a new image of African Americans. So, we have some familiarity with this concept, but tell us how it works in Pakistan and what kind of themes you take on.

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yes, I believe in collective thinking and believe in society, if you bring the issues from society. So I started my drama, taking issues from the society related with women, mostly, and people say maybe you will be failing this thing. But you know, for my first drama in 1993, it was a drama serial called "Marby", and it was on honor killing. I think you people know the honor killings. You can blame the woman any (inaudible), and you did this and then -- and they killed her. Woman.

So I did that. I got threats, so many from different areas, but I did so, and it went very well, and the people took in great -- they were encouraged, and (inaudible) a lot of paper, newspapers, they wrote on this, and magazines and people come and do the, you know, programs. So, we got -- this drama serial got ten years best award. It was before I came in a private channel, and after this channel, I did a lot of issue-based programs. Now, after 11 years, I dedicate a program. It was on daughters, because in our society, they prefer a boy, not a girl. So, I started that program, and it came very well.

I will show that a girl who was neglected by her father, and her mother -- how she supported her. And I always do this with very entertaining way. Not a direct -- I don't believe in a direct issue. So, her mother encouraged her, and she became a civil servant on a big position, and the boy (inaudible) -- a second marriage for a boy, and the

boy did nothing.

So, like such kind of issues, we take the women empowerment and the economical problem for a woman. But always very interesting, and people want to see, so this we do.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Yeah. This is of course, a way people absorb information, is through stories. We know this from our own lives. That's what you remember, and it affects your emotions, and that is, of course, what affects the way you make decisions. So, it's a very clever, very interesting way of insinuating ideas into society, and then their ideas, then of course, really stick. And with the honor killing, of course, you raise an issue that then it gets in the news, and then it is talked about.

And it also, then gives people, I'm sure, the courage to take their own grievances forward in the sense that they have their own rights. I know you have many other interesting programs, including a cooking program --

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yeah.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- and we may come back to that, but I'm going to now go to my final panelist, so I make sure I give you all a chance to ask some questions. And Nick Kowsar is also going to provide some visual aids for us, which is great. Could we have the cartoon slides up, please?

Nick is a cartoonist originally from Iran, as I said, but it was his cartoons - - and I'll let you talk about your "Animal Farm" series, Nick. It was his cartoons that were lampooning government and religious officials in animal form that eventually got you the death threats that put you in prison, and then forced you to leave the country. So, why don't you introduce us to these characters, Nick, but also -- and when you're doing that, help us understand the power of cartoons in Iran and in the political sphere.

MR. KOWSAR: Sure. Thank you very much. It is always working. And first of all, I have to thank the host and also, my good friends at Brookings for having me here. If you please would show the other slide, the crocodile -- we can start with that.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Would you show the second slide, first? Oh, sorry, I've got the thing.

MR. KOWSAR: Okay. So the trouble started from that crocodile on the right. The name rhymes with the name of Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, who was a very powerful ayatollah in Iran, but I couldn't draw an ayatollah, so I drew a crocodile, and the name rhymed with his, because Ostad Timsal rhymes with Professor Mesbah. And this caused a national security problem for Iran. (inaudible) was off for four days. The clergy and the ayatollahs and the members of (inaudible) experts were calling for my death, and also, in all the Friday (inaudible) all around the country.

So, I had the honor of going to prison for this cartoon, and the judge was the judge, jury and everything, Judge Dredd, (inaudible), who asked me to confess to drawing Ayatollah Mesbah. I said no, I drew a crocodile like pink panther. It's just a character. He said, No, were all the ayatollahs wrong? Yes, they were wrong. So now, here in front of all you holy fathers, I confess on Monday morning that yes, it was Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi. So I have sinned (Laughter).

So, now I can draw -- now that I'm out of the country, I can draw Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi with his crocodile tale. So if you go to the first --

MS. SCHNEIDER: So this -- I just want to make sure those of us who don't speak Farsi understand. The thing is that the name in Farsi sounds like crocodile -- the name for crocodile.

MR. KOWSAR: Exactly.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So everyone -- so you're in this bizarre paradoxical situation before this judge, where you're saying, no, it's just a crocodile. And you both know what you mean, but after all, it is just a crocodile.

MR. KOWSAR: Exactly. And from that point, I became a sponsor of Lacoste, because Lacoste didn't sponsor me for drawing a crocodile, but I'm buying Lacoste products from that (inaudible). So right now, I've started this series, the Iranian "Animal Farm", the animal that have ruled us, and many people hated me for it, because of that. Because unfortunately, for many Iranians in the opposition, the corrupt people like Rafsanjani are their heroes.

So, I turned Rafsanjani into Napoleon, the pig of the "Animal Farm". He's a money seeking, corrupt politician. Or Ayatollah Khamenei into the vulture of Chomain, and Ayatollah Khamenei as the octopus. And you know we have eight candidates for the presidential elections, and those are all the candidates. Eight candidates. And also, the creature, Ahmadinejad over there, he's a combination of a crow, a monkey, and he has a halo. And (inaudible) can explain to you what the halo means exactly, because he believed in front of the audience of the United Nations -- he believed that all of them were looking at a holy man, and they saw a halo above his head. So, I drew a halo above his head, and it's a trademark right now.

So, one thing that I've been trying to do is --

MS. SCHNEIDER: I'm just going to stop you for one second, just to make sure everyone gets that the octopus, the point there is that these are all -- there aren't independent candidates.

MR. KOWSAR: Right.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Right? They're all just tentacles, all sort of more of

the same.

MR. KOWSAR: Exactly.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Under control.

MR. KOWSAR: Reformists. Reformists. Two of them are reformists, but they're deformists. So, what I've been trying to do is to break the lines, to break the red lines and tell the Iranian people that it's okay to see their politicians as animals. They're not sacred beings. And what it has caused -- because I tried to provoke the politicians and to make them accountable, because we --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Are you provoking them now that you're in the United States? Or were you always --

MR. KOWSAR: I did with my own language in Iran, semi provocative. But right now, I can do it easily.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Mm-hmm. Well, as you told me --

MR. KOWSAR: Although I am getting threats.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- you're being --

MR. KOWSAR: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- it's not that easy. You don't feel that safe anywhere.

MR. KOWSAR: No. No. But still, it's much safer.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Mm-hmm.

MR. KOWSAR: So, if we go to the video, if you're --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Can we have the video now? And I have to say this, using "Animal Farm", it is a classic example of soft power being the power of attraction. So, I love that you have taken on "Animal Farm," and that has universal meaning.



Everyone recognizes the Napoleon, the pig.

MR. KOWSAR: So as you see here on the video, this is a platform that we have created that you can make your own cartoons by pre-drawn characters. Here, I'm showing like Ayatollah's Khomeini's ghost, and Mussad (inaudible) that many of you know. He's saying, yes, the masses love me. And Mussad there in response, will tell him -- kiss my mass (Laughter).

So, this is for the ordinary person that doesn't know how to draw a cartoon, and if he doesn't like the character, he can use another character. These all characters -- pre-drawn characters. I can put a Basiji, and I can, let's say, put another character, my journalist character together, and then I can change the text, what they're telling each other. So, you can do this.

So, we draw characters and then the audience, the follower can create the cartoon and then post it on Facebook and make it go viral. So, that's the important thing. And now, we're working on creating app, so anybody, anywhere in the world can create his own -- her own cartoon, like in many countries in Africa that people have smart phones. They can create their own cartoons, like okay, in South Africa, that they know Mr. Zuma has a background in whatever, about AIDS, and saying that if you -- sorry, after having a relationship, you can take a shower and you won't get AIDS if the other person has the HIV virus. So, you can draw a cartoon about that, but with the character that the cartoonist from South Africa has created for you.

So, we're going to different communities and giving the chance to the people to have a voice. So we're trying to give voice to the voiceless. And this is how we're working on this new platform, and now the Canadian government is going to help us progress with the web site, but then, we'll try to find ways to create the app and make

it an international tool for ordinary people who want to say something.

MS. SCHNEIDER: That is a very powerful idea, giving the voice to the voiceless through the do it yourself cartoons, tailor made to the foibles of every country's politicians. I'm sure all your minds are racing of how you would do it for your own countries.

Let me just end, Nick, by asking you, and then, I'll turn to the audience for questions, to just help us understand a little more in the context of satire in Iran, why these cartoons have such potency in Iran?

MR. KOWSAR: We have a saying in Iran that you can tell the truth, but just under the blanket. You can say anything, but under the blanket. That means you cannot tell anything to the powerful people. And the other thing is that in Iran, we have a saying. You have freedom of speech, but you don't have freedom after speech (Laughter).

So, as long as you -- people in Iran usually make jokes about the politicians, about the corrupt, powerful people. But it's not easy to do it under their own names, because they will be in trouble for it. So, we know there's a culture of satire in Iran, rankling the politicians. So, satire and also cartooning can be a tool to bring humility to a lot of these politicians who have this god-like disease. They want -- they think that they can do anything, and they rule the human beings and they see the human beings as their peasants, because they have oil money, and then they spread the oil wealth, and then, so they rule.

So, we want to change this by satire. And I think satire and cartooning is a very important tool to change the culture of the public. And we really need to make a real change, because changes like what the reformists were talking about for years,

didn't really work. So I think instead of political change, we are going to use satire and cartooning to change the mentality of the public, and to make them feel what they're doing and make the politicians accountable.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So this is actually -- that's a wonderful note to end on. And then I don't know if someone's going around with microphones, so I'm going to ask for your questions in just one second. I'll just summarize back, when you talk about changing the culture, changing the mentality, that's really what each of you are doing.

Sultana, that's what you are doing through your very powerful narratives that have embedded social messages. And you, Manny, talked about the music being the web that carries the stories, that brings the voice of the people to authority, and that is the way that society changes and evolves. So each of you in your different media, really is seeking to change society, and I think doing it. Actually doing it in very powerful ways.

I would welcome any questions or comments from the audience. Can we have a microphone here to the front? Do we have microphones? What are we doing? Right here in the front? Thank you. Please, if you wouldn't mind, introduce yourself before you ask your question.

MR. ROBERTSON: Hi, yes. I'm Chuck Robertson with the Episcopal church. Thank you, all of you, for really fine presentations and helping us understand the intersection of culture and politics. Nick, it's specifically for you. Thinking about political cartooning, in my country, in the U.S., it's a rich tradition that in some periods, early periods of our country, faced -- some cartoonists faced great punishments, as well, during the sedition and alien acts early on.

But I'm wondering specifically, about the network of cartoonists. Who is there supporting the work that you and others are doing? Is there some kind of an

organization or network? And if so, how does that work and how are you all supporting each other?

MR. KOWSAR: Sure. There is an organization called Cartoonists' Rights Network International that supports the rights of cartoonists all around the world who have been in trouble with their governments, local communities. And in 2000, when I went to prison and I --

MS. SCHNEIDER: (Laughter) Sorry, go. Just say that again.

MR. KOWSAR: It was too much voice to the voiceless (Laughter). So, when I got out of prison, I got a call from Dr. Robert Russell. He introduced himself as the director of Cartoonists' Rights Network, and from that day, I was the client, until I left the country, and they helped me leave Iran after I got a death threat in 2003. And now, I'm on the board, and we're serving cartoonists all around the world, like cartoonists in Bangladesh, in Malaysia, in South Africa -- many countries who have faced threats, and it's a network that we're getting help from different organizations. Even some governments through their organizations are helping this active work to give -- to support cartoonists in distress.

And although it's a very difficult process to help people, because getting somebody out of the country, like in 2006, an Iranian cartoonist, we had to help him get out of Iran, because there was a threat by the Azeri community against him, and other examples, like Arvar Rachmon in Bangladesh. He drew a cat and called it Mohammed the Cat. So that caused a big trouble for him, so now, he's fortunately in Norway, safe and sound, and he will later be helping other cartoonists. So, it's a chain.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Thank you. And I've been told we've been allowed a grace period of ten more minutes for questions from the audience.

We have amongst us the representative of Mali. If you have a question, you can raise it in question. It's not a problem. If you anything or any comment to make --

QUESTIONER: This is a great way to begin the day, and as a former musician, I want to direct this question to Manny, and ask him -- you know, one of the shots that was here was a shot of Bono at the very beginning of your presentation. The support for musicians globally is really critical, not only from the United States, given the political position of music back in the 60s.

But Manny, I wanted to ask you, if there was a way of bringing together all of the powers of all of the musicians who find their roots touched by you and who have something to say specifically about the freedom of expression, it would be discovering fire for the second time. What kind of support are you getting from musicians that have great global stature that can really take this message globally?

ALY ANSAR: We have received a lot of support via musicians in Mali are united (sic) facing the situation. Within Mali, all of the musicians in Mali were united in order to face the situation. We launched songs. We got together within Mali, so there is a good organization facing the situation. It's just repeating now.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- they're organized and to express their opinions about the situation. In fact, I read that the musicians of Mali, something like 45 of them came together and sang their feelings and their complaints to the government. Is that right?

MR. ALY ANSAR: And say you can't stop music and sing for peace.  
Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: What was the reaction of the government to that?

MR. ALY ANSAR: As I said, musicians have this freedom of -- they just let them do it.

MS. SCHNEIDER: They say what they think.

MR. ALY ANSAR: They say yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: They say what they think.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes. And we get also, help from international musicians like Bono, like other important musicians who visited Mali, who knows the importance of the music of Mali, in Mali and around the world. So we really an important support from many musicians around the world and the support of others.

MS. SCHNEIDER: We have also with us, Chris Shields, who's helping to organize your tour of the Festival in Exile, and I know there is a plan to have you perform at the general assembly -- at the time of the general assembly in New York, also in connection with the Clinton Global Initiative.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So that will be another gathering point --

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- where actually the Clinton Global Initiative has started a track of arts and resilience, which also has looked at Cambodia, which focuses on the role of arts and culture in rebuilding societies. So that will be another case where there is really a showcase.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Many festival organizers around the world, in Japan or in Glastonbury in England, in America, give a special program for Mali music in their this year program. So, we get a special place in many big festivals around the world to talk about what is happening in Mali, what is happening for music.

MS. SCHNEIDER: That is great. So, many -- if we can have the microphones heading towards these other questions? And also, there's one in the back. So, many of the great music festivals will then have a platform, a place for Mali, which I think is actually great, even better than festivals of African music.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Because that will already get people who are interested, and this way, you'll reach a broader audience --

MR. ALY ANSAR: Exactly.

MS. SCHNEIDER: -- who don't know about it. So that's great news.

MS. MACHNU: I'd like to ask that you --

MS. SCHNEIDER: Would you mind just introducing yourself, please?

MS. MACHNU: Sana Machnu from Egypt, from the American University in Cairo. I'd like to ask the three panelists about the way they are dealing with tradition. Manny here is calling for respecting the tradition of a music that goes beyond, you know, the present time.

And you are, through your programs, your television programs; you're asking to change the traditions, attitudes towards women, values, honor, whatever. And in Iran, you are asking to change a public culture vis-à-vis tradition. That is, to challenge tradition and to satirize it and mock it. So, I would like to ask, what are the values that you are standing for, vis-à-vis tradition? And what about respect? Because we have come to recognize that respect is the one ingredient that is necessary for tolerance and accepting the other. So again, the three panelists and your views on that?

MS. SCHNEIDER: Why don't you start, Nick, and we'll go down this way?

MR. KOWSAR: Sure. Actually, respect and also -- it's a two-way road. We also need respect for our own ideas. It's in many countries, the minority radical figures have the voice, and then there's a big silent majority. We want to give respect back also to the majority that's not getting the respect it's supposed to get. So, we're also fighting for the majority, although we respect the traditions, as well.

In my cartoons, yes, I'm mocking the ayatollahs, but not because of the religion. No. I'm a Muslim myself. I asked Ayatollah Montazeri, the Grand Ayatollah, years ago, that I want to draw a Grand Ayatollah. Many believe that an ayatollah is a sacred person. What do you say? He said, do your job. Offend, don't insult. So there is a distinct -- we can distinguish being offensive and insulting.

Yes, we are offensive. People that cannot take it call what we are doing insulting, but no, we believe that by attacking some values that are against humanity, human rights and the truth, we are serving the public. So to me, serving the public the giving them the truth, even if you call a cartoon a true lie because it's exaggeration of something, but it's letting them understand things that it's really difficult to understand. So we are translating politics to the normal audience.

MR. ALY ANSAR: In our case, in Mali, as I said, we have a tradition of tolerance, and our festival, our music, also is the music of tolerance for peace, and we have a new (inaudible) that is traditional. We rely on the tradition to spread our messages. So there is no problem with our tradition and what we are doing. We are relying on tradition and to spread this message of peace and tolerance. No problem for us.

MS. SCHNEIDER: So with the music that you play is rooted in tradition.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yeah, exactly.



MS. SCHNEIDER: And it has this message of peace as part of it.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Yes.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Sultana?

MS. SIDDIQUI: I believe in respect. My own respect and the society's respect and the respect of the men. I think the media is a very powerful tool, and it can change the society. You saw the Malala case. We changed the society, and the whole media is screwed up. That's why Malala is dead, and there are a lot of Malalas in Pakistan. And so, definitely, we believe in respect and changing the society with respect.

MS. SCHNEIDER: We have time, I think, for one more question from the audience, and we have one question on Twitter. So, could we take the microphone to this lady here? Good, thank you.

QUESTIONER: Haishah Hajami from Morocco, from (inaudible) University in Morocco. The question that I wanted to raise was already raised by my other colleague from Egypt.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Sorry. I'm going to get with the program. I apologize.

QUESTIONER: My question is pertaining to the limits of the freedom of expression. We know that the cartoons that have been very controversial and sometimes led to violent reactions in the Arab and Muslim communities, were done by individuals who probably don't understand the Islamic culture, and don't know the sanctities of the prophet in our communities.

You are living now in the United States, and of course, you have a lot of freedom of expression. Do you have the self control or oversight on your own cartoons, or let's say a cap or a roof or this practice that is part of the culture that can actually

change societies, and that can be a self criticism, auto criticism of some negative aspects in our communities? But I think that the limits or the boundaries between the freedom of expression and what could be considered as a violation of sanctities of a specific culture is a very narrow strip line, actually.

So, how do you conduct your work in line with these contradictions and limitations?

MR. KOWSAR: Thank you for that great question. First of all, as a cartoonist, as an editorial cartoonist, I'm a journalist, as well. So I have to obey the principles and ethics and ethical codes of journalism. And one of them is, serve the public and do not harm the public, as well. And I understand, like the Danish cartoons and what it created, it was done because an editor in Jyllands-Posten in Denmark said that why won't anybody accept the responsibility to illustrate the prophet of Islam for a children's book?

And then, he assigned a lot of cartoonists to draw cartoons about that case. Only 12 out of 42 cartoonists accepted this, because they did not know -- many of them did not know the sanctities and the reaction, actually that would come after that. And it was a different experience for all of us in the cartooning community.

First of all, yes, they have the right to express their minds, but on the other hand, there is a responsibility, as well. I do not believe in libeling. I do not believe in disrespect of the identities of people. Living in the west I respect people with different identities, something like in Iran, we weren't trained of this thing about tolerance.

So, one important thing that I think that many cartoonists have to think about is who is going to see their cartoons. Now, it's on the Internet. Anybody can see the cartoons. So, be respectful for the rights of people all around the world. That's one

thing. One of the rights is having an identity -- a religious identity.

So to me, as a cartoonist, I respect the identities of the Christians, the Muslims, people of the Jewish faith, Buddhists, everyone. I won't attack their belief, but I don't see that somebody like a cleric who is a Muslim and does something wrong, I won't just give him a blank check and not see -- and ignore his wrongdoing. No. He's taking advantage of Islam. So I will attack the person who is actually taking advantage of something sacred to do something wrong to his own people.

So there is a difference between that, and we're trying to talk to people of the world in Islam, the Islamic world, to tolerate these criticisms against those religious leaders who are doing something wrong, who are doing something against the public. It's different from criticizing the religion.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Thank you, Nick, for a really good, solid answer through really mine field territory. That was excellent.

I'm going to conclude with a question from Twitter which is directed towards Sultana. This is from Henri Kettati. And her question is, do you mentor girls? So are you a mentor for young women? And if so, how many go through your program or experience your guidance?

MS. SIDDIQUI: Yes, definitely, I do. And in my -- I have 500 employees, and most of them are girls, and they are heading the departments. My head of department is a lady, and the PR person is. So yes, I do. And especially, we brought a big change, because in Pakistan, girls from a good family, they don't come on film and television.

But this is a big change. From very good families, they are taking the acting as a profession. So I think it's a big change, and not only this -- and the writers --

a lot of writers are coming, women writers, female writers. So yes, I do.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Well yes, I'm not surprised that you have -- your own example does something, and also, that you directly mentor people. You know, the title of this panel was "Politics Demonizes, Culture Humanizes," which is a brief quotation from a Nigerian novelist, Wole Soyinka. And I think what we've tried to show you this morning is the way that culture can interact with politics and bring it home in very human terms, and get people to think differently about themselves and their society, but also, be really the heart and soul of societies.

So, I want to thank so much, my panelists for your really extraordinary insights. You've been just fantastic. Thanks to all of you for getting up so early and joining us, and Doria is going to tell us where to go next and what to do.

FEMALE SPEAKER: -- for a really terrific to panel and to thank each of our panelists.

MR. ALY ANSAR: Thank you.

FEMALE SPEAKER: So thanks all, so much. Please, everybody join me in thanking Cynthia for a really terrific panel.

(Applause)

MR. ALY ANSAR: Thank you.

MS. SIDDIQUI: I'm clapping for you (Laughter).

MS. WITTES: We do have a full day today, as all of you know, just like every day of the U.S.-Islamic World Forum. So now, we're going to be going to working group sessions. Conveners, that will begin at 9:15 to 10:45. So at 10:45, you have a coffee break, and then I'd like to ask everybody to please come back to Al Wosail Ballroom for our plenary session on Democracy and Development: How Do They Fit

Together. That will go from 11 to 12:45. We'll have lunch at one, and then we'll return back to our working group sessions from two to 4:30.

Tonight, we also have our off-site dinner, not to be missed. It's a restaurant along the Cornishe, and gives you a chance to get out of this hotel, as lovely as it is. So, please plan on being in the lobby at 6:45 this evening for our off-site dinner. Thanks so much. Have a great day.

MS. SCHNEIDER: Thank you. Thank you guys very much. Thank you all.

(Applause)

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