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THE NEW GENERATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN LEADERS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. KLUGMAN: Good morning, everyone. Welcome. On behalf of the Institute of Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security, we welcome you. Also, just some very brief introductory remarks. I'm thrilled to be here this morning with the Next Generation of Women Leaders from Afghanistan. It's a committed, well educated, and very capable group of women, and they are serving in very important posts across the board in Afghanistan, in finance, in mining, administration.

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security is deeply committed to supporting women's participation in these important spheres of public life. This work of the Institute began just months after its founding, in 2013, where we hosted the then Secretary of State John Kerry, and important leaders here in Washington, D.C., on advancing Afghan women. Followed up by another event in Oslo, together with the Government of Norway, and last year we had a couple of important events with the First Lady of Afghanistan.

Melanne Verveer, our Managing Director is deeply committed as well, she's a member of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, which is an important private sector and government group.

I think we are all very aware of the challenges facing Afghan women and this, indeed, emerges very clearly from the recent work we've done, published in a new global index, capturing women's achievements and inclusion, justice and security for 153 countries around the world. Afghanistan actually ranks last on this index, in tied place with Iraq, although there were some clear bright spots.

And I was checking again this morning, women's political participation, for example, in Afghanistan stands at over 28 percent of the national parliament. We can compare that to the U.S. where it's below 20 percent, in fact only 19 percent. So, there are important bright spots and I think our panel will be able to illustrate that well this morning.

So, let me just introduce the panel, and I'm sure they'll be reflecting more on their personal experiences, and give you more of a sense of what they've done.

Her Excellency Adela Raz, Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her Excellency Naheed Sarabi, Deputy Minister for Policy, from the Ministry of Finance. We have Muqaddesa Yourish as well, another Senior Member from the Government. Shararzad Akbar, Senior Advisor to the President on High Councils; and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, who is with Independent Commission for overseeing Implementation of the Constitution.

I think that many of you will be here, in fact, because you've looked at their impressive bios and seen all of the achievements that they've made to date, and I think what makes for a kind of very promising careers.

We also, of course, have Michael O'Hanlon who is Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, a very august career in the public space and in academia as well. So, I'll turn over to him now, because he'll be moderating the panel. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Well, thank you, and good morning. And I'd also like to thank the Ambassador and (Inaudible) for all their wonderful help in convening this event today. It's a real privilege for us. And those of us who care about Afghanistan, who've been watching Afghanistan and admiring the Diaspora, the young leaders of Afghanistan especially, and in this case women leaders of Afghanistan.

So, it's a real treat today. And I know a lot of you are people who have been involved with Afghanistan for many years, involved with the Georgetown Program for many years, but I still think it's worth just hearing a little bit about the story of each person in a nutshell.

And I think we'll begin by just going down the line and asking each of our panelists to describe very briefly, sort of, how they got to where they are, whichever parts of their story they think are the most interesting, just within a couple minutes each, but

also what they are doing now.

And then I want to go and proceed with a second round of questions, that will allow each person to describe a particular reform or area of improving government service, or improving the strength of Afghan society that they are working on now; and, again, not comprehensive, fairly brief, but illustrative of the talent and the efforts that we have going on here.

And then, if I still have time before going to you all, and we'll certainly look forward to your questions, but I would want to get out a third round of questions. And maybe if we are running out of time, we'll merge that with the discussion with the audience, which is: at a broader policy level, how does what they're all trying to do mesh all of the ongoing challenges that we know Afghanistan faces today?

And some of them were just alluded to by Jeni, and others we constantly hear about in the newspapers, the ongoing difficulty of moving beyond a problem of corruption, that I'm afraid my country has contributed to, with the massive influx of resources that any country will be challenged to withstand, in a sense. And then have that massive influx, almost just as fast get pulled out.

Moreover, trying to mesh and juxtapose modernity with tradition, and I don't mean tradition in a pejorative sense here. Obviously there are elements of tradition that make it hard to construct a modern state, but there are other elements of tradition that make Afghanistan so wonderful in its culture, and its history, and its people that we don't want to lose. And I'm sure that the panelists here would agree with me, that they all are very proud of their country and its culture. So, how do we understand the effort of reform in this kind of complex context? But I'll save that for later.

Let's start with hearing a little bit about the wonderful women we have today on this panel. And I'll begin with Adela, and just ask, go down the line, then to Naheed, and Muqaddesa, and Ghizaal, and Sharazad. And each one will just say a couple of words about their story, and then finishing with what they are doing today. My

friend, over to you; and welcome to Brookings.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: A great morning to everyone. And first of all, thanks to Brookings for having this wonderful group of Afghan women in here. My name is Adela Raz, I'm the Deputy Foreign Minister of Economic Corporation of the Government of Afghanistan.

And I was raised and born Afghanistan. I never left Afghanistan, I only left, it was during 2004, so I stayed the entire civil war there.

I came to the U.S. in 2004 for my higher education. I went to Simmons College in Boston; I did three Majors in economics, political science and international relations. Followed by a Master's at the Fletcher School/Tufts University, and if there's anyone from Fletcher Mafias I would like to see them.

And I did Law and Diplomacy, finishing with Fletcher. I worked in D.C. for two-and-a-half years for an international development organization, and then it was in 2013 that I went to Afghanistan.

And the reason I went back to Afghanistan, it was literally the peak of the entire discussion about 214 and the collapse of the sinking ship, which it was the whole discussion where the U.S. Forces are going to leave, and Afghanistan will collapse.

And I remember the day I decided that I wanted to go back to Afghanistan. My mom almost went crazy. And she said, everyone is leaving, and you're going back. And my answer to her was, that's the reason I'm going. Because I realized that if I'm here and I'm lobbying with the U.S. Government to make sure that they stay back in Afghanistan, I thought I don't have the right to do that lobby, because I'm staying here, and I'm asking them to stay in Afghanistan.

And another reason was also, I started to realize I was constantly picking on the government and trying to critique what they were doing. And I noticed that if I wanted to be part of -- if I wanted to see the change in Afghanistan I need to be part of the change.

So, since then I don't regret it for a second, because as soon as I went I started to work with the government, at the time as a Deputy Spokesperson of President Karzai at the Presidential Palace. And followed that with President Ghani, I worked as his Chief of Staff for Administration Office of the President, and my second appointment with the new administration was as the Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Corporation.

I love what I'm doing, and I'm very happy I'm here. So, this is my very short story of the journey, how I started, and how I made it here. Thank you. (Applause)

HER EXCELLENCY SARABI: A very good morning to everybody. I'm so happy to be here with such a great group. My name is Naheed Sarabi, again, I was born and raised in Kabul only until 1996 when I had to leave Afghanistan for Pakistan because I couldn't go to school anymore when the Taliban took over.

In 2003 I came back to Afghanistan. And then I entered university, in the department of social sciences, and then I was able to get a scholarship to India, and I studied political science and economics.

When I came back I started working with the Office of the President for one year on programs. And then I got another scholarship and did my first Master's in Development Management from Ruhr University in Germany.

And after coming back, again, I worked one year for the Ministry of Finance where I started my career. I'll tell the story later. And then my second Master's is in Applied Economics from Western Michigan University in the USA, and I'm actually a Fulbright Scholar.

When I first joined the Ministry of Finance, I was really amazed by the ongoing activities around the future of Afghanistan, and I was always amazed how to develop policies and programs that affect the life of millions of people. And that's when I decided I would join government, and if I have to pay -- I have to contribute to these policies, to these efforts that, as a young generation, I have to take the responsibility, this

is the starting point.

And it was in 2010 when I joined Ministry of Finance as an intern. It took me around two years to promote to the position of Director. I oversaw development of 22 national priority programs in 2013. And then after my second Master's I came back and joined the Ministry of Finance, and now I'm Deputy Minister for Policy where, again, I oversee the coordination of implementation of Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, and all development policies. Thank you. (Applause)

MS. YOURISH: Good morning, everyone. I'm Muqaddesa Yourish, I work as a Commissioner for -- now bear with me -- Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan, and in short we call the Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan.

I'm just, like everyone else on this panel, I was born and raised in Kabul, but I had to leave Kabul as many other Afghan, for that period, where Afghanistan was occupied by Taliban. So that's where I did my schooling, in Pakistan, and I obviously returned to Afghanistan with my family, post-9/11.

I have done my Bachelor's in India, and I did a dual major in business and international relations, and then I came back to Kabul, and I was involved with the -- I worked with the private sector, with the independent consultancies. I came to U.S. on a Fulbright Scholarship. I did my Master's in business administration, an MBA.

So I decided to go back to Kabul, I was trying to -- I had offers both to work in the private sector and also from the government, and I was really having a hard to decide whether I wanted to work for the government or go back to the private sector. And back then, obviously, now the job market has shrunk, and a lot of people are interested to work with the government, and back then there were a lot of opportunities in the private sector. And there were very few women who would work in the government.

And so I really had a hard time deciding, but at the same time I realized that your government institutions are the face of the state, and pretty much all the other

work that everyone else does in the private sector, or the civil society, the donor community, is basically the background work. And it feeds into that bigger picture, where, when it comes to implementation that's where the government kicks in.

And when you don't have the capacity in the government, so you basically cannot absorb all the work that has been done in the background, and I think that was one of the main reasons that triggered me to, basically, go and join the government. And obviously, not to mention that I did realize that there are a lot of women who bring in the same skill set as me, and who work in the private sector so it would definitely be a -- it will give me a professional development opportunity, and the opportunity to stand out and service public sector.

So, that's how I decided to be with the government. I started my job with one of the very complicated government institutions, the Kabul Municipality. And when I always talk about Kabul Municipality, I love saying: it's all about power, money and land. So, that's basically where I started.

But I'm very happy I started there, because I think my working with the Kabul Municipality help me to understand the core of what's going on in the government, and the extent of corruption that exist in the government, and also allowing me to -- motivate me to stay here longer.

And then after Kabul Municipality, I was promoted to be their Commissioner for the Civil Service Commission, which is basically the municipality I was taking care of 8,000 people for Kabul, and now we are dealing 420,000 people across the nation. Thank you. (Applause)

MS. HARESS: Good morning, everyone. My name is Ghizaal Haress. It's a pleasure being with this group of lovely women. And thanks to all of you for coming here.

I was born in Afghanistan, and back in 1992 we took refuge to Pakistan because of the civil war that started. And we spent 10 years there, and in 2002 I came

back to Afghanistan. When I first came back to Afghanistan the war-struck city, Kabul, it was a very difficult picture even when I imagine it now. To see all those destroyed buildings, to see all the -- how depressed people were after those years of war. But you also see the hope in people's eyes, and that was when, although I was pretty young, I decided that, well, this is our responsibility.

We were not responsible for the destruction, but we should feel responsible for the reconstruction. I started working with civil society institutions, and I was highly inspired by a number of women lawyers and judges, one of whom is standing right at the back of this room, (Inaudible), who has been an inspiration to me. And it was these women that I looked up to, and I decided that I wanted to study law and become a lawyer.

I did my bachelors in Kabul University, I studied law, and then for one year and I went to London, and to School of Oriental and African Studies, where I did a LLM in Law and Development, and basically focusing on developing countries.

While I was in London, I was mainly looking into how developing countries enforce rule of law, and how much institution building is important in order to strengthen the state, the state institution and institution building, was the focus of my work and research.

So, when I came back to Afghanistan I decided to make a shift from civil society to the government, and I started working with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. I led a National Priority Program for four years.

And then I move on to the place where I am now, Independent Commissioner for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution. In short, this is our Constitution Oversight Commission, and our job as a Commission is to ensure that the state institutions implement the Constitution, fundamental rights are protected, and guaranteed, and to ensure that we report on the violations of the Constitution, and help the state institutions better implement the Constitution.

My portfolio in the Commission is to look into the Constitutional questions that come to the Commission and help draft opinions that the Commission has to present.

I also wear another hat. I'm an Assistant Professor at the American University of Afghanistan. That's another thing that I do, that I really love, particularly because I have to deal with the Afghan youth, and when I see their passion, their hope for the future, that gives me a lot of strength to stay there and to be around those wonderful, younger ones. Thank you. (Applause)

MS. AKBAR: Hello, everyone. I'm really honored to be sitting, and sharing this platform with these remarkable leaders, and I'm very, very honored to be among all of you. I'm also slightly intimidated, please don't ask difficult questions. (Laughter) This is going to be a really busy week.

Just a little bit about myself. I was born in Jowzjan, and lived across Afghanistan, and we spent a few years as refugees in Pakistan as well. And we've went back to Kabul, my family moved back to Kabul in February 2002. Like all Afghans, one thing that I share with everyone, I think, of my generation, war and migration. I have been impacted by both.

I came to the U.S. to study in Smith College. I have a family that really valued education above all, and so I remember before departing for -- and I was (inaudible) I think well built for my age. So, when I was departing for Smith, I remember my father brought me a Dari translation of Sylvia Plath's poetry, telling me that she went to Smith, and you have to know her.

And Smith just reinforced many of the values that I had learned at home at prayers, about tolerance, and also, and very importantly, about feminism and women's rights. I then went to -- moved on to U.K. to study, to do my Master's in Development Studies, and had a nice comparative experience, comparing the education systems in the U.S. and the U.K. It just seems much more (inaudible), I have to say.

When I returned to Afghanistan, I worked for the private sector for a while, and then joined Open Society Foundation, which is an excellent institution, and I had the honor of leading the Open Society of Afghanistan Office for almost two years.

Throughout my work in Afghanistan I was also involved in a lot of political activism, we got together a number of us trying to re-imagine a narrative for our diversity and our unity as Afghans. And also, re-imagine the values that bring us together for a better Afghanistan, and moving on from ethnicity, and village, and (inaudible) of political mobilization.

I have joined the government recently, and it has been a cultural transition. It has been interesting. I can talk more about it later. And the two threads that run through my life and continue to inspire me, are Afghanistan and feminism. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic! I'm in awe of the talent and the life experiences and the efforts of the folks up here. And now I just want to pose a very simple question to everyone and go down the line again, and I think we will involve you at that stage, and if I have any additional questions, I'll work them in with yours.

But I really just want to ask each of these extremely impressive women to tell us a little bit about something that they are doing in Afghanistan today by way of, improving governance, promoting reform. Or, if they wish, they can share some other story that gives a sense of some of the new energy and dynamism that the younger generation is bringing to Afghanistan today.

So, really the floor is yours, to tell us a story that's pertinent to your experience and your work, but really to, you know, illustrate in whatever fashion you like, the changing and improving nature of Afghanistan today, and what you are trying to get done there, individually, and as a group. So, again, a fairly open-ended question please, you know, choose -- go in whatever direction you like.

And I should have said also at the beginning, that I know how honored,

John Allen, the new President of Brookings, and Former Commander of the ISAF Mission, how honored he is as well, to have this amazing group with us today. And also extends his thanks to the Ambassador, and to (Inaudible) for the opportunity to host, along with our friends from Georgetown.

So, Adela, over to you, please?

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: Sure. Well, I, in my portfolio, the work I do, and how it strengthens the government's vision. It's a regional cooperation, and regional economic cooperation. So, I remember when I first joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in that specific portfolio, and this, the deputy ministerial position didn't exist, and it's a (inaudible) created position. And it really comes with His Excellency's vision for Afghanistan, to turn Afghanistan as the roundabout of Central and South Asia.

His vision for Afghanistan is that we want to turn Afghanistan as a land-lock country, from a curse to an opportunity, because we are really the bridge between South and Central Asia. And economically looking where Central Asia offers is a huge supply of energy, and where South Asia offers, or what it needs is really the energy. So there is a high demand and there is a huge supply. So, Afghanistan really is playing the role to connect and bridge this supply and demand.

And at the same time, because we are a landlocked country, it's extremely important for us, economically, in order to have access to Europe, and to Central Asia, and to further South, we really need to build on -- work on our connectivity in transit.

And I remember when His Excellency, the President, first came to office I had the honor to work with him closely in his office while I was working at the President's office at the time. When he would talk about his vision, there, they would look around the room, and people would really think, this is just a myth, and it will never happen, and how Afghanistan could be hub in a roundabout.

And today, after about three years, and I look at those people, and

especially my counterparts who would come from South and Central Asia, and I see the drive and the interest; and then the realization that they really come and have -- understood that Afghanistan could be, and is it possible, could be a bridge between South and Central Asia.

So, my work, what I do with -- I started with the regional -- strengthening the Regional Economic Cooperation, and with that focusing with greater and big, mega, regional projects that we have in the region. One is the (inaudible), which is giving us access through to the Iranian market, and as well as to Indian, and further down to Asia.

The second one is the TAPI, which I think most of you have heard about. It's a gas pipeline coming from Turkmenistan going all the way to Pakistan and India. And I remember when I was 10 years old, or so, BBC World Service was talking about TAPI, and I remember that image of the gas pipeline and how it affect the lives of people in Afghanistan in terms of creating jobs.

And now, so they are working on that project, and really seeing it come to a reality, because very soon we are going to inaugurate the pipeline to reaching Herat. It's an honor, and it really is this, we are heading in the right direction.

In terms of regional cooperation, it took me a good year, to working within my ministry to take that portfolio, but I have it now, and with that portfolio what we really focus is pertaining the role we play, meaning Afghanistan.

I think one of the successful foreign policies we had in the last 15 to 17 years, and specifically in the last three years, we played a pretty neutral role within the region except for one neighboring country, and we all know which neighbor that is.

And that really gave us the strength and our neutrality to focus, because our region, we are constantly saying that our region, despite having the rising economy, we are still the least integrated region, and it's our geopolitics that kept us very isolated.

So, Afghanistan right now manages, really two important regional platforms, which is I'm working on them. One is called the RECCA, Regional Economic

Conference on Afghanistan, which is very specifically focused on regional economic cooperation and priority projects that the Afghanistan Government identifies with our regional partners, and it's focused on Afghanistan.

The second one is the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, some of you might have heard about it, and it's focusing on building trust within South Asia and Central Asia Region to support political cooperation, and very importantly the important -- the time that we live right now, which is fighting terrorism -- so really coming together with a cohesive approach on how to fight terrorism, and how cooperate with each other, and it's a challenge. We are still working on it.

So, that's the broader approach of our work. And I think I'm going to stop here, just not going on and on.

MR. O'HANLON: Naheed? And that's very good, thank you.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: Sure.

HER EXCELLENCY SARABI: Thank you. So, my portfolio as I mentioned before, I deal with the coordination of Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework is the second generation of Afghanistan development strategy that finished in 2013, and from 2013 until 2016, we didn't have any national development strategy.

Only in 2016, it was when government and President gave the vision of a self-reliant advance, and what are the basic things that the government has to accomplish in order for us to be self-reliant? And a few years from now, achieve fiscal discipline, and achieve fiscal sustainability.

The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework has 10 national priority programs that are vehicles for implementation of our vision towards development of our country. For poverty reduction, for services delivery, we have to ensure that we have basic infrastructure, we have to ensure that we have rule of law, we have access to justice, we have our human capital, and human resources intact in order

for the country to develop.

My role is exactly to coordinate all these national priority programs, which s a very big portfolio, it needs a lot of coordination within ministries, all ministries, all implementing agencies in Afghanistan, and the most important task that I really feel sometimes which is challenging me is what to prioritize really.

The needs are immense, the resources are limited. Sometimes there are challenges in terms of implementation, not only it's not the issue of capacity, but it's so many other factors that are built into complexity of implementation and delivery of services.

So what we do in the first year of reforms that I work with our colleagues and the Ministry of Finance would take care of the budget part, is to ensure prioritization is really built into the budget process of the country.

And for the first time we had a very transparent and credible budget, that whatever we budgeted in 2018, actually it had resources in the ministries, and our government was capable of delivering. And as a result we got the score of 49, in the Open Budget Index, and Afghanistan, in the region, was the second-best transparent budget after Nepal, which was a big achievement for the government.

But there is one National Priority Program that is a flagship program for our government that I want to focus, that is a Citizen Charter Program that I played the role of a coordination body, along with other implementing ministries. We ensure that the basic services are delivered to the communities across Afghanistan, and our claim is that in 10 years from now, every village in Afghanistan has access to school, education, has access to health, has renewable basic energy, and basic infrastructure.

The rural areas are connected to urban areas, and we have the self-sufficient village communities, who can be the help for a prosperous Afghanistan in coming years. And apart from that, there are bigger projects that we work on our portfolios, as the Deputy Minister mentioned, from infrastructure to making sure that

institutions are built, and the justice is ensured, and we have a plan for our human resources management. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

MS. YOURISH: Thank you so much. So I think what I do is essentially a boring part of the work. I basically make sure I inject the right human capital which is required for all this inaugural latest work with the government. That's basically part of my portfolio is taking care of the civil service appointments across the nation, and all the government institutions.

I think strong institutions are the missing link in the Afghanistan story when we talk, and when we talk of strong institutions, it's basically institutions that are centered on professional human capital that is, I think, sufficiently independent, but from private influence and political influence.

So, for a long time, the civil service appointments have been patronage/nepotism-based rather than merit-based, and when you bring in human capital to that system, then that definitely translates into lower capacity in the government, and obviously affects the overall efficiency and delivery of the services to the public.

So, what we have been doing is trying to make sure that we replace that with merit-based appointments, and I think the bigger-picture aim is to make sure that we restore public confidence in the civil service, and obviously the myth that I had to deal with when I was making the choice of either going to the private sector or to the government institution, is actually, I think, part of that. When we talk of the civil service, a lot of people back home still think that appointments in the civil service can only happen through bribing people, or to knowing somebody and all that, somebody powerful, somebody who is a warlord, somebody who has connections, who is a regional patronage, and that's how you basically get into the civil service.

And I think a big part of our job is to basically try to deal with that, and take those baby steps that would restore the public confidence and change the

perception of how appointments work with the civil service.

Another part of my work is the administrative reform which, in a rosy form would be the business process simplification of the (inaudible) here, is that trying to make sure that the institutions or organizations are basically equipped with resources, with structures, and everything that they require to make sure that they can deliver the job.

And we do that through -- we have started that with the functional reviews that we carry out on different institutions, and that's part of the bigger -- it feeds into the bigger reform agenda that we have for the country. That's all for now.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Ghizaal?

MS. HARESS: Thank you. Well, we all know that having a Constitution for Afghanistan is one of our biggest achievements, since it has been (inaudible). Not just because we have a Constitution, but also because it has been a stable Constitution in the last 14 years, and has also been implemented.

So, when it comes to my portfolio, and when we talk about the Constitution, there's a wide acceptance of the Constitution, whether it's among the government institutions, or even those who would like to get public offers, and even if some of them have the background of war, or warlordism, or whatever, they still use the constitutional channels in order to get to power.

So that makes our job both easy and difficult. Easy in the sense that there is a wider acceptance of the Constitution, and you see it makes you happy, it makes you hopeful that people use the channels, the constitutional channels in order to get to power. But it also makes it difficult because if you look back at the history of constitutions in Afghanistan, we have not really had very long, stable constitutional periods.

So, that whole culture of constitutional mechanisms, constitutional enforcement, is rather weaker. What we do in my Commission when we first took office early 2016, the first thing that we tried to do was to redefine our scope of work, to

legislative framework, because the earlier legislative framework had a very, very limited mandate for the Commission, which wouldn't really allow it fulfill its mandate.

The next thing that we were trying to do, is basically to emphasize, and to focus on the independency of an institution, such as the Constitution Oversight Commission, because for a number of institutions within the government, the Constitutional Oversight Commission was not a strong institution, or was not strong enough to impose certain -- or certain aspects of the Constitution, or required institutions in order to act accordingly in accordance with the Constitution.

So, that took a while. It wasn't an easy process for us. But what was great about this process of dialogue, in talking with the different institutions, is that we changed or we turned this whole -- sometimes I call it this discussion of the deaf, into a very engaging, and into a very effective dialogue.

Before 2016, the Supreme Court wouldn't want to talk with this Commission, and would rather see this Commission as a rival. For some of you who are involved in the issues of constitution and constitutional interpretation, you would know that this has been a sort of a dispute between the Commission and the Supreme Court for more than a decade now.

But it's very interesting to see how there is a dialogue that has started between these institutions, and they would rather talk rather than ignoring each other, or trying to step over each other's territory or jurisdiction.

What we try to do in the Commission is basically try to come up with reports, study specific areas where the constitution implementation takes place across the three institutions, and then try to come up with reports. And a strategy that I have been promoting and lobbying for in the Commission is that, first we should not be the kind of institution that tries to get as much power as we can, because we will not be able to deliver. We need to focus on what we have.

Secondly, what's really important for a Commission like ours is that we

need to create -- we need to engage into a constructive relationship with other state institutions, rather than being destructive. It's very easy for an institution like us to stand up and say, okay, so the President's office, or the parliament, or the judiciary, violated these number of articles of the Constitution. That's very easy to do, and it will make us, probably, a famous Commission. And it will make us like, we can bargain at some fronts.

But we have decided that part of institution building, we have to have the culture where we try to be constructive rather than destructive. We try to go to specific institutions, be at the Supreme Court, be at the Parliament, and talk to them about how, together -- or the Commission can help them better implement the Constitution.

I think this is the kind of approach that has -- they have not seen, at least from the Commission in the past, and that is something that they appreciate. They are not threatened by the Commission anymore, and that creates a sense of collaboration between the Commission and the state institutions. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

MS. AKBAR: Thank you. So, I work with this structure called High Councils. They are basically multi-ministry, multi-entity councils, platforms, they are chaired by the President at the higher level, and they discuss a range of sectoral issues.

One of my favorite High Councils is the Urban Development Council, and I hope the people in Afghanistan don't hear this, the people from the higher councils. But I love it because we get to hear from the mayors. So, you know, I have sat on several of these High Council meetings where a Mayor from a very distant province, distant compared to Kabul of course, from Kabul perspective, and per province comes in and talks about their work.

But they have several things in common. All those mayors, they are young, they are well educated, they have chosen to go and work outside Kabul, in different provinces, which is not a choice that a lot of people would make, because of security, but also because of, you know, political relevance, being where things happen.

They are also all trying to change people's expectations of governance, and redefine their office and their role. So, I have sat and listened to, for instance, a Mayor from Hurr, one of our very remote and very poor province of Afghanistan, and a young who talked about how -- he reported back to the Council on his efforts to combat land grabbing, which is a huge issue. So, a lot land, now we realize that a lot of government land is already built on or taken away by powerful people.

And the talked about -- very honestly about the problems that he faces, and doing this, and how needs community support, but also the President's support, and judicial support. He also talked about how he's trying to increase the venue, and he talked about initiatives to fund the open shops for women, local women, business women, and he talked about the service delivery and improvements in the service delivery.

And I was surprised when he talked about not only recruiting women for his office, trying to recruit women to bring more of a gender balance in a place where there were no women, but also he talked about how he's thinking about creating spaces on the whole for women and families to spend time in, parks and other spaces.

I mean, what do I take away from Council meetings and, you know, we have also a very active Council on anti-corruption where we hear stories of people who risk their lives every day to combat the really strong corruption networks.

What I take away is that this is a transition of governance in Afghanistan. I am witnessing a transition of governance of Afghanistan, and I'm in the middle of it, and I can see the challenges first-hand.

For a government that has always been shaped by, I mean, for the most part by the political patronage, people came in having the interest of their own interest groups in mind, people who don't collaborate with each other, even ministers, because of the political fragmentation in Afghanistan, and in our politics.

Now, everyone is made to sit around the same table, and when a mayor,

you know, reports on land grabbing, (inaudible) has to step in and say, how will they provide support to this particular mayor, who may be from a different ethnic group, and even maybe from a different political interest group.

So we are aiming to work together as a government, we are also finding a common technical language, a common language to talk about development, to talk about service delivery, a language that's local, and it's in our own terms. We are also coming together forming new identities as government officials, regardless of our political or ethnic identities, we are all in this together, we have to be held accountable by public and deliver a service.

Of course it's not easy, of course there are many challenges, and there are a lot of divides, and there are different ways that people still govern, but I'm always inspired looking at the younger -- my generation, and seeing how they bring to the table some of the difficult conversations, they initiate them, but also how they really try, at the local level, to change people's perception of governance.

I'm sure all of us here, and I'm sure those mayors, they receive calls daily from relatives saying: find me a job, or give me a position, so I'll take that contract. We do this every day, this happens every day. Our response is, no, this is not how things work anymore. And that initial reaction is disappointment in government, because people are used to government working in this way.

But slowly, I'm hoping that once people see the impact of our work, we will really, truly change perceptions of state (inaudible) relations.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic! (Applause) I'm going to go to the audience in just a second. But I do have sort of one transitional question I thought of, that I wanted to get everyone to just give me, really, a one-word answer to. And the reason is that, I think anybody listening to you would be inspired. But a lot of Americans are not so hopeful about Afghanistan, and probably a lot of Afghans, aren't so hopeful about Afghanistan given where we are, and given what you've been through, what we've been

through together, but especially what you've been through.

And so I want to connect these hopeful stories to the big policy questions that we have here in the United States, and I'm sure in your country, about how hopeful we should still be about the future of Afghanistan. And you all know the situation here.

President Trump reportedly thought that we had already overinvested in Afghanistan, and what was to his mind, perhaps a hopeless cause, and his instinct was to pull out. He was persuaded not to by his advisors, and other people, perhaps, like yourselves, who told him about the importance of being successful.

I think President Trump saw this largely in counterterrorism terms, but nonetheless, people like Secretary Mattis, and National Security Advisory McMaster, understood the bigger picture as well. But we are at a point where we hear each reporting cycle, more of Afghanistan is now contested by the Taliban, or under control of the Taliban. Secretary Mattis has decided not to even give information any longer on how much of the country is controlled by the government, he has decided to classify that that makes a lot of Americans nervous, maybe there's just bad news that he's trying to hide.

And so, what I want to ask you all to do, without feeling any need to just, you know, give happy talk, but to give your real gut feel, of how hopeful you are about your country's future.

And let me tell you, I'm one of the more passionate supporters of the U.S. and international efforts in Afghanistan, and one of the more positive people on Afghanistan that I know in Washington, but I would probably only give an answer, on a scale of 1 to 10, somewhere around a 6 or a 7 today.

In other words, my hopefulness that the project will work, that what you are all trying to do will succeed, that the country will hold together, that the political system won't collapse, that the Taliban won't ultimately take over, that the country won't return to civil war.

My hopefulness used to be maybe an 8 or a 9, now I'm sort of down to a 6 or a 7. Still, more good than bad, but I would love your answers, if you are willing to speak in those kinds of terms. And no one is going to hold you to this permanently, although of course we are public. But, you can always, you know, write a blog post tomorrow to revise your score, because I realize I'm ambushing you with this question a little bit.

But I still think it's important, because the very positive stories you're telling need to somehow speak to that bigger policy debate, and that bigger policy uncertainty that we face here in the United States and around the world. So, on a scale of 1 to 10, 10, being the most hopeful, and 1 being the least hopeful: how hopeful are you about your country's future?

And again, I'll just reiterate that I'm somewhere around a 6 or a 7; but Adela, more importantly, over to you and your colleagues.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: Sure. Sure.

MR. O'HANLON: And just a quick answer, we can get into a discussion after.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: Sure. Yes. Well, Michael, you need to have (Inaudible) here, so we tell you the true story of what's exactly is happening to increase the score. So, mine is 8.5 to 9, and what's the reason because as a mother, and I'm sure there are women in here -- mothers in here, it's really important as a parent when you start to think about the future of yourself when your child, that's a different type of thinking.

I have and 11-month daughter; and I live in Kabul, and I'm optimistic, and my optimism and enthusiasm comes from what I see there. So, yes, I do give credit to the media, but sometimes I blame them too, because sometimes they really cover the extreme stories.

There are changes, and there are positive changes, and we are a part of

that change. I mean, if you would have asked us seven, eight years ago, any of us imagining where we are today, not really. So, my hopes and my optimisms are extremely high and I look to share that even more and more; so, more good and positive panels in here.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent! Thank you. Naheed?

HER EXCELLENCY SARABI: My answer would be 9, and again, to reiterate that, in 2001 who would have thought we would be here, sitting here. And I think with one condition, that we all have to converge on one policy, and one kind of dialogue, that we can't reverse. This progress cannot go back, and if we stick to that, I think that my score would even reach 10.

But if we are going to run along this (inaudible), this won't happen. So, your chart is that whether you take the negative aspects of the media, that results are on the spot, or the positive ones that might take years to come to fruition and it will.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Okay, Muqaddesa.

MS. YOURISH: Thank you. I always say, there's no short cut. I think state building and also building state policy, and legitimacy takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. We have to be patient with it. I totally agree with everything that you said, Michael, but at the same time I think you make peace with it. You know, when you consider yourself, especially -- at least it's the case with me that you consider yourself as part of this generation that is supposed to be there so that the transition happens.

You know, or you consider yourself as somebody who is equipped with certain tools, and can be a facilitator, you know, for that transition to happen. And when you look at it from that perspective, I think that the question of hope would come later, so you first, you know, make peace that you want to be part this. But definitely that cannot happen, unless and until you have hope.

MR. O'HANLON: So what's your number, the score?

MS. YOURISH: Well, I think 9.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay.

MS. YOURISH: I tried to avoid that though. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: (Crosstalk). Ghizaal?

MS. HARESS: I'd say like a lawyer, it depends. So, basically, there are days when there are attacks, there are civilians killed, and I'm probably very hopeless, and I'm depressed, and all of that. And then the next morning I wake up and I'm like, yeah, that's one part of the story, but we have 100 other things on the other side.

And it doesn't take me very long, probably a night, or probably a good sleep, to get back to a very high number. Today, I don't want to give nay numbers, but I'll just tell you, if I did not have the highest hopes I wouldn't be in Afghanistan. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

MS. AKBAR: That's a trick question. You are asking a very complicated question that involves my future and the future of millions of people, and it's very hard to put a score on it. So, I decline to put a score on it.

MR. O'HANLON: Fair enough. Fair enough. Okay. Let's open this up, please wait for a microphone, please identify yourself, and again, you may ask the question of the whole panel, or to any one specific individual. I'll take about three at a time, and then we'll go back to the panel for a response. So, we'll begin over here, the gentleman in the front row, then we'll come forward here, and then we'll work our way back. Yeah, we'll take four questions at a time, (crosstalk).

MR. WENSING: My name is Kevin Wensing with First Global. And looking at you reminds me of the young Afghan women's team that came to the First Global Challenge last year. So, my question is, what else is being done to enhance education for all people, all young people, but in particular women in Afghanistan?

QUESTIONER: Thank you so much, Michael. First of all I don't know what to say. As Michael said, wow. Emotionally I'm very excited, (Speaking in foreign language), let me say a little Farsi: (Speaking in foreign language). And although

Afghanistan's situation is really worse, but I'm really proud of you guys that, you know, it's higher class, and as I say, I'm really proud. (Speaking in foreign language), and the village in Afghanistan.

I'm very concerned. Last week I saw in the village in Chahi, violations against women, especially in the young generation (Speaking in foreign language), it was really, really sad for us. We don't have any problem at the U.S., but only we are concerned about Afghanistan, especially the women situation. What will be your reaction and your job to fight against that, women violation? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Let's take two more. The gentleman here in the third row, and then we'll go to the woman in the fourth row, and then we'll come back to the panel.

QUESTIONER: Hello. My name is Fidel Strasmani, and like many of you, I was born and raised in Afghanistan, and I have the privilege of being a Fulbright Scholar as well. Thank you. I am really thrilled and proud of you, and when I see panels like this, of the new, young generation of Afghanistan, the young leaders, I'm really proud.

My concern to Ms. Adela Raz, is about micro economy, actually you talked a little bit about the macro economy level, and I'm curious if the Government of Afghanistan has any programs and policies, or strategies that supports women at grassroots level? Because we all know that women and children are the most vulnerable group in Afghanistan, and they suffered a lot. But we shouldn't forget that they are the most resilient as well.

So, in terms of security, anybody can actually answer this question. In peace-building, peace-keeping conflict resolution and conflict prevention programs, we do not see the role of women as strong as it should be, and we all understand, including the U.N. Security Council, that has policies and resolutions that women should participate in this. But what do you think, what is the role of women and the young generation to

keep peace in Afghanistan, and bring this equality? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And then we've got one more question in the fourth row. Yes, please?

MS. DARLING: Hi. I'm Lacey Darling; with the Women's Democracy Network at the International Republican Institute. First of all, I want to thank you all for being here, and it's such an honor to be in the presence of strong women from Afghanistan that have gotten to the positions that you're from. So, thank you so much for working in women's empowerment.

My question is, you know, for so many of us Americans on this side, as individuals we want to know what we can do, what we should research, what we should look into, what we should be asking questions about? So, I couldn't begin to ask you to describe in just a few words, what makes you hopeful or, you know, the things that you're doing. But if you could reference maybe one organization a piece that we could research more on, or something that we could look up and talk about on Twitter, or anything. That would be really helpful for us here. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: And Adela had a great suggestion. I'll take one more question, and then maybe it works out, one respondent per question. And so, right here in the fourth row, the woman in the peach sweater.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Tasha Koore Monana. It's great to be here. Some of us were having a discussion before the panel. What went wrong? What did the United States do wrong? Increasingly we are hearing, that went well, you know, we should have done things better, we didn't do things right, and I know that some of you were here representing some great initiatives, some U.S.-Afghan, among the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

Adela, for example, is an alumna of the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women, Fulbright was mentioned. I think as we look: what did we do wrong, I think that one thing that all of us, U.S. and Afghan together, have to do, is point to what went right.

Obviously you are here; all of you mention the importance of your education and your training, the internships and so forth, and I think this is one thing we do have to reference going forward.

I think maybe one wrong thing, and I'd like to know your opinion. For example, are we not doing enough to show the impact of a huge program like the Promote Initiative; I'd love to hear what the impact of *Promote* has been on your work. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, all. So, why don't we start with Adela, and just work down the row, and we'll see if it works, that we get roughly one person per question, but good luck.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: I'm going to answer half of the last question, and followed by that, half of Fidel's question. So the remaining I'm going to leave it to my colleagues. Starting off with what went wrong, and what went right. I think wrong is that when we start to provide unpredictable picture, to both our society and back in Afghanistan, and also in here, when I talk about unpredictable picture, it's this, we say that we will stay in Afghanistan and the next day when we change our mind, and we say we are pulling out.

I think that is the wrong thing to do. In the last few years, I think, and recently there had been a very committed and very strong message coming out from the U.S. administration, from willingness to stay with Afghanistan and to stay with that region to fight terrorism, and that strong message has already started to help the civilians in Afghanistan, with optimism, and really making and moving forward, as well as people in the region, too, so that will be the right thing to do.

In terms of promote, there are some very effective and strong programs in Afghanistan, but one of the ways, and Michael, you may share the same experience, projects and programs and funding that has helped is that when we think about long-term sustainability. I'm going to very -- I'm going to be a little harsh, I'm going to request all the

donor community, when you are investing in Afghanistan, don't think and don't look for the short-term results, and let's move away from those trainings.

I'm not going to make any more comment on promote, but let's think about the long-term sustainability. I work with the development organizations, it's usually, you right away, evaluate the effectiveness of the program the next year. But it doesn't happen in development, and long-term sustainable work.

So, enough of training, let's think of Afghan women anymore as being the victims, and the recipients of -- how do I say -- support and help, and in the sense that you think they are just the survivors. I think, think about them as your partners, and that's where the image will change. (Applause) Thank you.

Quickly, on micro economy, that was referred to me. We are really thinking about the micro-level work as well. We have, and as Naheed will mention, and she will make a greater reference to it, we have a program, on Women Economic Empowerment Program, that's what it's called WEEP, and the focus of that program, for the first time it's a five-year plan to think about on the national level, both on major policies, on how to support women economically, and also on the grass-root level.

So, Citizens Charter, and WEEP together has been an effective and strong tool, and also a great focus towards women entrepreneurs. I think for the first time within the government, in the last -- one year, there's a great discussion about how to work with women entrepreneurs. And I wanted to convey their message here as well, that we have women entrepreneurs, who are not anymore working at training level, and looking forward to do, how to do marketing.

I think now that they are the level, that they have a good level of production, good quality production, and they need your support to get access to your market. Thank you.

HER EXCELLENCY SARABI: You sort of made an arrangement between us, as to who will respond to what questions, Fidel, but I will also add on what

Deputy Minister Adela mentioned, that Women Economic Empowerment planned something that is really coming different with this program, is working on the statistics, gender and disaggregated statistics.

Any program or policy that you design for a woman, you need to have data, what are the women beneficiaries, and what are main beneficiaries. And I think this is the first time that the government is taking a lead on this. The other aspect of -- and I want to touch on what went wrong with some of the development programs. As a finance person, and coming from the Ministry of Finance I would really insist on-budget support programs that are going off-budget, and doing things that are not aligned with the government priorities.

I know needs are a lot, and reach the communities and they will give you a wish list of what things need to be done. But without doing a further -- and actually a comprehensive analysis of what is really important for a government, what would really come first for the government to tackle in terms of governance, and structures, capacities, and also needs of the communities.

I think at one point it was necessity to go and reach out to communities and give them that helping hand, but there is a point -- there was a point where government had the capacity to take over and plan better. So, I think my insistence would be on that.

I just wanted to talk about on the role of women in peace-building and peace-making process. One part is the negotiation process, that I think within the High Peace Council, we have a Deputy of the High Peace Council, a woman, and also within the largest factor of the High Peace Councils we have more women now entering, and they are a part of the assembly of the High Peace Council, they are involved in the negotiations.

That is the overall structure, but also going down to the actual peace-building process that is more time taking, reaching out to villages, communities, and

they've built the structures where they reach to the pioneers at each village level, where they, again, go and talk to other women in the villages and the communities that what rule they can play in the peace-making process, in the peace-building process.

How, starting from their families, how they can build -- or the trust -- or the community trust. How they can encourage their children that peace is such an important aspect of life, is that there is no good in conflict at the community level, and at the national level.

The government is, I think, we all have recognize this important role of women at the community levels, and also engagement of olema, with women that -- that how they can help each other, and also female olema. That this is a time-taking process, but this is a very important and sustainable approach.

MS. YOURISH: I'll take the question on education, and when we talk about education in Afghanistan, and what the government, if I'm correct, if I got the question correctly, what the government is doing towards education, particularly for women, I think if you look at the past couple of years, a lot of development fund has been spent on schools and education. I don't have the exact figures to give you, but there has been a lot of work done, at least in order to make sure that our schools in different districts, and in different villages.

That does not mean we have schools in each and every district and village of Afghanistan. I don't want to present a rather incorrect picture. But we do have larger number of schools, larger number of teachers, and larger number of women's enrolment into the schools.

That same thing applies to universities as well. In 2001 we had very few universities, even in some of the big cities, the universities were not functional, but now when you look at a number of provinces, and you see that there are universities in more than, I would say, 16 to 17 or 18 provinces, they do have universities.

Some of them have higher number of enrolment for women, some of the

have lower number of enrolment, and there could be various factors, security, tradition, culture, all of these plan a role in that. But there is also the private institutions for education, and although the government does not necessarily have a direct role in that, the role of the government is to give them that space, and to give them that opportunity to operate.

And there are a big number of private schools, both in Kabul and in the provinces, there's a big number of universities, and the government provides a lot of support, particularly they try to make sure that there is a quality assurance of these private institutions.

One of the examples could be the American University of Afghanistan; the American University has a very large enrolment of women, from different provinces. From the remote provinces, it's difficult to imagine that you have a girl coming from Helmand, her family is there in Helmand, but she's studying and even staying in a hostel provided by AUAF.

But the role of the government again, in an institution like AUAF, the role of the government comes in. When AUAF was attacked in 2016, and how the government, again, provided the support possible in order to make sure that this institution remains open, and the students who are studying, or who are hoping to study at AUAF, they still have that opportunity.

So, to me, a lot has changed since 2001. We still have challenges ahead of us, but I think we would rather look at the achievements that we have than the challenges.

One more thing is how the reaction of people have changed, how this whole social mentality towards education, especially education of women have changed. We've been talking about that in the last couple of days, but I know one of my own relatives who had a young daughter, and he said she could study up to grade six.

The girl had really a fast growth, and was very tall. Now she's taller than

me, she's only in grade nine, but her father repeatedly said, she can only go up to class six, because where they were the school is far away, and young girls just, traditionally, don't to go school, they drop out after grade six.

But now she's in grade nine. Her father's perspective has changed because, although the school is far, they have teachers, they see more girls going, there's a lot of encouragement. People tell them, you cannot just ask your daughter to drop out, and allow your son to go the school.

So this might be one story, from one family, that doesn't represent the whole of Afghanistan, there might be still girls who are not allowed, or will drop out, but there could be millions of stories like this, where the perceptions of people, or families, of parents have also changed towards education.

MS. HARESS: I'll quickly try to answer the question about violence against women. Violence against women is widespread; it's a real problem in our society. There are different ways to deal with it. I don't think it's something that we can overcome quickly, it's a global phenomenon as well. But there are several aspects that I see -- where I see progress and also challenges.

So that one aspect is definitely law enforcement, and we have now widespread security reform, and our security institutions are being reformed with this idea in mind, that there will be stronger law enforcement agencies.

The other aspect is access to justice. You know, having enough women -- having women, enough women attorneys, lawyers, there's greater capacity being built, there are several scholarships, there are programs within our own institutions in Afghanistan. There is also, now we have an Attorney General that I can say with confidence who believes in gender equality, and has been trying to bring that understanding, and to bring that spirit to our -- to Attorney General Office, and to our attorneys.

The other aspect -- the more challenging aspect perhaps, is the social

and cultural changes that see quite -- we all are slightly the conflict, our social fabric is broken and is being targeted. There is a lot of issues that we struggle with as individuals, and as communities.

But on that end, there are many amazing women's rights champions inside and outside Afghanistan who work every day, and they are both men and women, to educate, to reform, to encase compassion, understanding and empathy, to redefine gender norms, to push the boundaries, to denounce violence, and I think that that work will take longer, but I see it happening every day, people taking great risks to do that work.

I just want to also answer the question of one lady here, who asked organizations, that we would take (inaudible). I love our (inaudible) vendors, I think they are the bravest people I know, they are constantly under attack, they work with limited resources, and with a lot of problems, so especially with our print media who provide a lot analysis, and also hold as the government accountable.

I can give you names later, but I think one thing to look at is how, in a very difficult region, Afghanistan has a very vibrant and strong independent media. The developmental programs, my colleagues talked about it, the Citizens' Charter, to look at that, especially if you are interested in service delivery to the poor, and inclusion of the poor, and poverty deduction it has a -- It's a very interesting model.

And this may be considered nepotism, but one organization that I really am a fan of, is three women writers led by my sister, Hujah, look them up, they are online as well, and they did some really interesting work in bringing the voice of Afghan women to the world.

MS. AKBAR: Just to add on girls' education, 38 percent of our students are girls right now, and I know this is not enough, we have to do a lot. One of the plans the government has looking into the challenge of having more female students, is that we didn't have female teachers. So, only this year, government is recruiting 3,000 female

teachers to send to the very far districts and villages, so that we ensure that more girls are attending school.

And also toward the Citizens' Charter Program, the communities that we are working with, 50 percent of the community -- I meant 49 actually to be precise -- 49 percent of or community members are females, who would then make sure that more girls are attending schools.

MR. O'HANLON: So, we've got time for one more round, I think. What's that?

SPEAKER: (Inaudible)?

MR. O'HANLON: I'll call on you first for round two, actually. But I'm going to get my own question in, and it will just be one of the five for round two, you don't have to answer it now. Because of what I hear you all saying and who you are. I'm intrigued about your attitude towards the peace process. You are young, brilliant women, who presumably would have some concerns about any kind of a compromise with the Taliban, on terms that are traditionally associated with the Taliban.

So, how do you think about the potential for peace, some kind of a negotiated settlement of the conflict? Under what kind of terms could that ever even be a viable concept, if at all? So, that's my question. And now, I'll begin, ma'am, with you here in the second row.

QUESTIONER: My name is Najir Hazam. First of all I want to say thank you so much for making us proud to come here and show all of us, and all over the world, the women of Afghanistan that we are not just sitting at home and wearing burqas, and no education, nothing else. We are really proud of every person in Afghanistan who is living, specifically the women who are living there. But I have a quick question, not specifically to you, because you continued the answers so I've -- asked your name -- which is, what is the market plan for the women in Afghanistan, like for their products.

Is there any specific way for them? Or, we have a lot of, like promote the

-- we talked about, they give, like, vendors, and donations and everything, they had a lot of times to work on it, but we don't see any specific market for the women's products. Not like handicraft specifically, we have a lot of other stuff, you know. How about like carpet, like jewelry, you can ask for that. But my question is: what is the specific plan for the marketing of this stuff? Thank you so much.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's stay in this row here for the next.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. And I'm very happy to meet you all here today. I'm (Inaudible), I work with (Inaudible) Center, and my question, and my concern is about women in government. I just want to know, on your impact as women, young women leader in government, and the life of other women in Afghanistan, it's not just inspiration, I'm looking for something -- sometimes general activities, like working on policies, or implementation, or like role, gender, friendly environment and government for women. And what is your plan for each one of you, when you join the government? And what do you want to do for other women in Afghanistan?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. I'll take two more questions in this round. Let me go further in the back.

MS. LeGREE: Good morning. My name is Marina LeGree, and I run and organization called Ascend Athletics, we work with young women in Afghanistan using sports as a way to develop leadership. So, my question to you is, what is being done, or what do you envision should be done to create stronger networks between women, with younger women? What happens to the next generation of girls who are in ninth grade? And how can they see a path to public service? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: A question all the way in the back, yes.

QUESTIONER: Welcome, all of you. Thank you for being here -- (speaking in foreign language). I'm Marina Vasaal, I'm an Afghan-American Journalist. And this question is really for all of you, perhaps to you firstly, Michael. The Afghan war is proceeding into its very lengthy years, America's longest war; we are seeing the

Taliban gain more and more territory. For many looking into the situation, it seems the Afghan situation is deteriorating.

As one of you mentioned earlier, the foreign policy that engaged the international community; and getting involved in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Cold War and dropping of the ball then, this is all something that's tied into where will this war go, both for Americans and Afghans?

And while I hear you talk about the success, mainly in the shape and form that some woman have managed to gain education and come here, and that is perhaps considered life-changing for Afghanistan. Can some of the women here, please (inaudible) that Afghanistan women didn't get their rights during the Russian's or the American invasion of Afghanistan, that Afghan women had a role in Afghanistan. While it is noteworthy for all over the world for gender equality to be something that is achieved, things have to be put in context.

And if we do not have security in Afghanistan, and if our security is hinged on what foreign policy and capitals like Washington bring for us as a country like Afghanistan; then, you know, what role does the role of women play? Can I sum that up by asking you, Michael, for you as an American to comment on this? What is the importance of American involvement, and international involvement in Afghanistan?

And can you ladies, please, qualify the progress that has been achieved for democracy, for the elections ahead of us, and for the role of women? I mean, to see people being asked if they are Afghan or not. I grew up in Afghanistan where no one ever asked me what I was made up of. I'm a mix of all sorts of ethnic backgrounds. And yet, this is what you are going to explain to people, to have a voting card. Isn't that correct? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So, we've got about 10 minutes, and we'll do the same sort of thing. I'm going to give my 20-seocnd answer to your question, and get out of the way for the more interesting answers.

And I'm going to second what I think somebody said a moment ago, which is, you don't hear a lot of praise from me for President Trump overall, but I think his basic approach of making a decision that's going to be indefinite in duration, and then trying to get Washington out of the drama, of always rethinking every year whether or not we stay or go; that part of Trump's thinking is good, and it's an improvement over President Obama, who I respected and preferred as a President overall.

But on this issue, I think lowering the sort of drama about Washington, do we stay or do we go, is actually a healthy thing. Because ultimately it's going to be Afghans who decide and who determine their own future. They need our help for a while, I don't think we can leave yet, but we have to make ourselves a supporting part of the story, not the main part of the story. And with that, over to Adela.

HER EXCELLENCY RAZ: I'm going to start with your question, and then I'm going to go to the last question. In terms of the peace process and the potential (inaudible) peace, and in what terms: as an Afghanistan citizen, as a government official, both, and as a woman, I think our terms are pretty clear. The terms are that those Taliban, very specifically, who denounces violence, and those who respect the Constitution where Article 21st, gives equal right to both men and woman, and that's the article that will be never negotiated. It has been stated by His Excellency, the President.

These are terms that peace negotiations and peace talks will continue with the Taliban, and those who still continue to kill civilians, and kill Afghanistan children, and men and women, as an Afghan citizen, and as a government official, I don't think so, we can settle to continue to talk with them.

And I really do acknowledge the great steps taken by the U.S. Government to come in line with the same approach we have, that those who kill our civilians, we won't negotiate with them, but we will fight them; if that's clear. Yes. (Applause)

And a comment in terms of the last questions and the long -- the U.S.

Government's long war in Afghanistan, I think sometimes I'm really -- I'm really hurt by that kind of statement, that it's U.S. Government's long war in Afghanistan. I think we have to think about, in looking from a broader and from a different perspective.

Meaning, this is: our shared war, it's not your war individually, or only U.S. war, it's I think a war of every global citizen that lives today in this world. We are fighting terrorism, and we are fighting global terrorism. And that unfortunately happened to me that Afghanistan is the frontline of it. It's not a war that we are only fighting local Afghan insurgence, and the U.S. Government is there to help and it's a war between Afghans.

I think we have to look at the complexity of the war, and I constantly say, if we were fighting Afghan insurgence only, it would have not taken them 17 years to still continue to fight us, with all the resources given by the U.S. Government and the international forces, NATO, to us. So, it really makes us to think a little bit deeper, that how do they give, quote/unquote "these insurgence their support."

These are terrorist groups, and we have strong evidence that they get their support from outside of Afghanistan, and very specifically, one country that we constantly name, and we absolutely are on, I'm with Michael. I think President Trump administration is one of the effective steps taken is the clarity coming out from the White House, and then very specifically asking Pakistan, that they must cooperate in dismantling terrorist sanctuaries in their country, otherwise there would be consequences, because that really is one of the major reasons that we have a prolonged war, all of us.

And I have to also highlight the importance of us together fighting it. And I must remind each one of you, that before 9/11 Afghanistan lived, and we were in a condition, and I lived at that time in Kabul during the Taliban regime. We have a regime that put us in isolation from the entire war, and it creates safe havens for terrorist groups, like al-Qaeda, to wage terrorist attacks here, even in the U.S.

And today you are living, and we all live in an administration in Afghanistan where the political leadership is willing to cooperate with the international community to genuinely fight this global terror. And it just happens to be our security forces fighting it.

And the bravery of those security forces is something that, it makes me feel proud as an Afghan citizen, and it makes me proud to call your security forces, who are together with us, that we are your proud allies, and you are our proud ally.

So, I think I really, really, my genuine and humble request is, do not name the Afghan war to be a long war, it's a complex war that we all, tougher, are fighting global terror. Thank you. (Applause)

HER EXCELLENCY SARABI: To the first question, I think as an Afghan woman citizen, any effort that will contribute to the stability of Afghanistan in the region would be welcomed, although even if I have to compromise with my personal feelings, and personal issues that I have with so many people, that we trying to negotiate with.

But also taking into consideration that there are a lot of all these acts in Afghanistan that need to be settled, once we reach to that stable situation where we would have a transitional justice, which is an important issue for me. And what is not really negotiable, it's the achievements that we have made in the past couple of years, including women's rights, and access to information, and democracy, not negotiable at all.

And quickly on one of the questions regarding the market plan for women, what we really -- for Afghanistan what is really important is not at this point, not the elite woman, not the woman in urban areas who big businesses, which they might be able to in a situation where they can make their connection. But our focus is more on the rural woman, for whom we have to find a market. But they can bring their rural products to the urban areas, and they can -- like actually the house -- the women in the households who can support, and our aim is more on the poverty reduction side, both on

the economy and poverty reduction.

So one of the initiatives that we have taken under the Women Economic Empowerment Plan Framework, is to encourage women in the agricultural sector, and we are -- and especially in the kitchen gardening area, field, and access to finance, which would in the coming years -- one issue that we have to consider, demand in Afghanistan is a lot if you have to take your items of agriculture products. Taking care of our demand, the military, both Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, would actually open a lot of market our Afghan women, if they are helped in that. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Muqaddesa?

MS. YOURISH: To your question, Michael. I think for me, I have a very holistic approach to peace. I think whenever we -- you say peace, then it continues -- automatically in your mind, you resonate it with security. And for me, it's very different, because I think every other attempt can be considered a peace attempt if it feeds into the broader picture.

For example, if the Civil Service Commission announces 17,000 vacancies, and provide 17,000 job opportunities to families in the remote districts of Afghanistan, I consider that a peace attempt. Or, if we have an attempt to destroy patronage network, I consider that as a peace attempt. Or, the attempt to -- this year to revise the educational curriculum, I think I consider that as a peace attempt.

And just to quickly go, I want to answer one of the questions related to women in the government. I consider it my favorite topic because we've been talking about this the past couple of days. I think the women on this panel are a great testimony of the women in the government, and the fact that Afghanistan women slowly have moved that typical victimized nature of an Afghan women, and we continuously have this discussion by calling the continuously emerging group of women who talk about how we want equal opportunities, in the sense that we have the credibility. We don't want token women anymore.

And we always have this, the fact that I say it's my interesting topic to talk about is because there's an ongoing discussion about women who we think we still need the presence of token women, and women who think that token women, basically, undermines the legitimacy and the credibility in the long term.

And just to quickly talk about two things that we have recently done in the Civil Service Commission to make sure that we have more women joining the government and joining the civil service, is the fact that we recently came up with work safety policy, that make sure that we are making our workplace, especially the civil service more and more secure for women to join, and also not only for women, but for the families who have this myth that civil service is not safe not enough for the women to join.

And also the fact that we have a Women Coaching Centre, we recently opened the Women Career Coaching Centre, where we make sure that we provide career, coaching and mentoring services to the women in the government. And I think all of those, definitely, are the baby steps but, again, they are crucial and major steps in making sure that we have more and more women in the government, not only women in the government, but credible women in the government.

And just to quickly give an example, or just to talk off of personal experience. I think there still is a widespread disbelief about the women's credibility and ability. I have this experience on multiple occasions, that I walk into a meeting and I sit there and listen, until I open my mouth, everybody assumes that I'm there just for the gender card, you know, the token woman.

So I think, well, that will definitely take time, but the fact that at least in my workplace, but within a couple of weeks people realize that I am not there for my gender, I'm there basically as a professional, and to do something and deliver. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent! Thank you.

MS. HARESS: Yes. Quickly, on two things. How do we create network

between women and younger women. I think these networks already exist, there are times, like a very good example, as a few days ago when women wanted to get together and discuss the law and violence against women, and you could see how rapidly this whole crew of women were coming together in order to have -- to discuss, and debate, and to decide on what should be the way forward.

In terms of how we work, I think all of us have individuals within our organizations and institutions, families, and they come to us, and they would like to know what we are going through, how did we get to where we are, and we feel, I personally feel, and I'm sure everyone else on this table, we feel responsible to share our experiences.

And to tell them that it has been a tough path, it has not been an easy path for us to get where we are, but it was worth it. We have changed perceptions.

As Ms. Yourish just said, we have changed perceptions in the sense that they don't consider us as just a woman being around the table for the sake of being a woman, we contribute, we talk, we have issues, we have problems. There are times when we end up into a fight, and there are times when we get into very serious discussions.

But that's all part of the struggle, and we try to make sure we mentor them, and to keep them both motivated to be in the government. To come into the government, and to learn, but at the same time how to take care of certain challenges.

A quick addition to the market plan for women products. Two things: one, if you look at the products by women in the last couple of years, or compared to now, this whole production by women has diversified. Right before coming to this trip I went to a women's exhibition in Kabul, and there you could see a variety of things.

Yes, there is still the handicraft, which is a significant product by Afghan women, but you would also see media production run by women. You would see that there were consultancy firms running by women. Cafes and bakeries run by women. So,

the field has diversified, and that shows they are not keeping themselves limited to carpet and handicrafts, and all.

And also very recently, Chamber of Commerce for Women was created in Afghanistan, and that also gives them the opportunity to connect with women or with other businesses and markets, nationally, and regionally, and internationally.

MS. AKBAR: Thank you. I know you must be tired, so I'll try to keep it short. Just one comment about Mr. Fidel's comments, if I heard your name right: I think here we are all aware of the fact that women's struggle in Afghanistan is not something new, it's not something post-2001, our own mothers struggled, and before that. We have a sense of gratitude to every woman who stepped before us, came before us, in different periods, different governments, worked to empower women, and worked to include women.

So we are very, very aware of that. We might do need to learn more about history, because history is mostly told from the perspective of men. We need to, maybe, rewrite our history, this being one of the reasons, but we are aware and we are grateful, and I understand that I wouldn't be here today, if it wasn't for many Afghan women who went before me, who were on (inaudible), who were, you know, beaten by the Taliban, who stood up and had many small and big acts of resistance.

Our issue of women in government, I just want to make a joke. It seems like we always have two jobs, one is doing our job, the other is doing something directly for women as well. My male colleagues rarely ask how their work impacts men, it just goes. You know, people assume that, so it's a lot of expectation, and we are grateful for the expectation because it's a sign of confidence, but it is also a challenge. It is also a challenge to always be there around the table.

You know, when I ask questions in some of these big gatherings, I always try to supplement my questions with a technical question, as well as a question particularly about, like how this project impacts lives of women. Because if I only talk

about how projects impact lives of women, they'll box me in that, and then they won't include me in security discussions, and political discussions, it will just be: okay, so we need someone to talk about women's rights.

Regardless of your profession, please come and talk about women's rights. Well, I also have a development expertise. I have been trained and an anthropologist, you know, all of that, everyone on this panel. So, that's just a joke.

In terms of peace, Michael, I have anxieties, I think we all have anxieties, and I think -- and my colleagues responded to your question, but one aspect that's important for me always is that Taliban, if they want to negotiate they have to come with an acknowledgment that this is a different Afghanistan. This is not the Afghanistan of 1990s.

It's a very different Afghanistan, there are a lot of stakeholders in the power, political power, but also they are dealing with a new generation, they are dealing with a social and cultural shift, and they have to calculate that when they sit down at the table with us. And we'll surely pass on that message. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Well, exactly. You beat me to it, because I thought that was the perfect note to finish on. So, on behalf of Georgetown and Brookings, and with thanks to the Ambassador, and (Inaudible), and all of you, please join me in one final round of applause for this amazing group. (Applause)

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