

Challenges to Women's Security in the MENA Region

Jane Harman:

-- survived "Snowquaster" yesterday, that caused us to cancel a breakfast this morning, although the weather is now beautiful. Maybe that's a good omen over this conference, which I am very excited about. I am Jane Harman, a former nine-term member of Congress and the first president of the Wilson Center who happens to be a woman.

[applause]

A special welcome to Ambassador Houda Nonoo of Bahrain. Are you here? Is she here? She's in -- on her way. It's a privilege to host this remarkable group of foreign ministers and policymakers from across the MENA region. The Wilson Center follows events on the ground in the MENA region very closely, and some of our best scholars are, as you might guess, women. And by the way, today some of us were just talking about the news, which is discouraging, that the Supreme Judicial Court in Egypt has now found that the election scheduled for the end of April doesn't meet constitutional requirements. I know that some in Egypt question whether that election will be inclusive, but the notion that, yet again, there are delays is very troubling at a time when Egypt needs to move forward and build a pluralistic democracy which includes equal rights for women.

We just hosted a very productive meeting this week with Pakinam El Sharkawy, who is the assistant to Minister Morsi for political affairs. And Morsi's foreign affairs secretary and human rights coordinator were also there, women, and the discussion was frank on both sides. A lot of progress still needs to be made. There's also Wilson's senior scholar, Marina Ottaway, who is sitting over there, who has written extensively about Islamist parties in the Middle East. She hosted a fabulous event last week when she released an excellent report called "The Resistible Rise of Islamist Parties." I encourage you to check it out, and it shows that a strong, competitive, well-organized opposition is the only guarantee against the emergence of a new authoritarianism.

I think many of us here, I'm certainly one of them, think that Islamist parties are here to stay, and that is okay provided that their behavior is inclusive. And the only

way to make sure that happens is to have organized opposition that wants to participate in the political space and learns the skills and effectively can help shape what the majority parties are going to do. It's a shame in my view, as I just said, that the liberal secular opposition in Egypt, at least for the moment, is boycotting the election, assuming there will be an election sometime in the spring. They need to be in the game, too. After I read Marina's report, I sent it our ambassador to Egypt, Anne Patterson, who is a close, personal friend and I think a superb representative of our country in Egypt. She thinks -- she said she thought it was the best report she had read on the subject and she's circulating it to many on the ground in Cairo.

Another one of our top-notch scholars is Robin Wright. Her book, the "Islamists are Coming," is a print publication which we update I think daily, or maybe -- but certainly weekly -- on the web. And Robin's point is that there are so many different Islamist parties -- some moderate, some more extreme. Her count originally was 52. I don't know where it now, but what her book shows is that this is not a monolith, and that one has to understand in-depth what's going on in the Middle East in order to make valid assessments of what the best policies might be. This is what the Wilson Center does. We are deeply committed to promoting women's leadership across the world and to making certain that objective views of situations are available for those who want to do what we call a deep dive.

We have an action platform, called the Global Women's Leadership Initiative, which is led by Rangita de Silva de Alwis who is right here and whom I call a true rock star. Our goal -- one of our goals with this platform is called "50 by 50," which means 50 percent women in leadership positions worldwide by 2050, and Rangita will explain how we got here and what we're doing about it. We're making real progress. Gender issues are also a cornerstone of the center's Middle East program, led by the fearless Haleh Esfandiari.

Today marks the Middle East program's 125th meeting on gender since its inception in 1998. Haleh will moderate this panel and it is one of 11 that we have already done in the MENA region as part of our longstanding program on women's empowerment. Today's event was organized by both

the Middle East program and the Global Women's Leadership Initiative.

Our thanks to the fabulous organization Karama, which means "dignity" in Arabic -- what a wonderful concept and what a wonderful name -- for bringing together the remarkable women that you will hear from this morning. Karama puts emphasis on women from the ground up; quote, "Addressing violence as they define it with solutions of their own design." I have been passionate about these issues I think forever, but during my long Congressional career I served on all of the security committees of Congress -- the Armed Services Committee, the Science Committee, the Intelligence Committee for eight years as the senior Democrat, and the Homeland Security Committee where I chaired the Intelligence Subcommittee. I also was the principal co-author of the intelligence reform law that passed in our country. It was signed into law in 2004.

But in that year, we had a presidential election, and I was on the platform about to introduce then-candidate for president, John Kerry, who's now our Secretary of State, and I was looking out at an audience of about 5,000 people, women and men, trying to think about what could I say that would be a little different from what everybody else would say. And all of a sudden it came to me, and I said, "Security is a woman's issue." And I see you all nodding. It is a woman's issue. You know, I think all issues are women's issues, but with respect to security we come at it in a variety of ways. First of all, we are usually the guardians of our nests, and as a mother and grandmother myself, I know how fierce I am about protecting my family. So that's one way in which security is a woman's issue. Second way is we are often -- not always, but often -- the support systems for our broader families, our parents, our children, our siblings, when things go wrong, and women do amazing things, are incredibly strong in roles like this, and it marvels -- I marvel at how women, many women, can do all of that and be exceptional professionals. But that's the third way that security is a woman's issue.

I would argue, I do argue, and I hope to some extent I am a model for this, that women can play on security policy at every policymaking table in the world. We are qualified to be legislators, to be executives, to be presidents, to be Defense secretaries, et cetera, and that is yet another way where women, who, again, start with this urge to protect

families, can take that urge, plus our excellent training, and try to set up situations where we not only minimize security challenges but promote avenues toward peace. I strongly believe that personal security is national security and that national security requires economic security. So, a whole range of issues will be addressed this morning by an incredibly impressive group of people.

Our moderator is Haleh Esfandiari, and if you haven't met her before, you'll be very impressed by her now. Please welcome the director of our Middle East program, Haleh Esfandiari.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Can I invite the panelists to come up? Thank you. I do. Maybe I should go this way. I'll go this way. Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much, Jane, for your very kind words and your caring for women's issues. For those of us who work at the Wilson Center, it does really make a big difference if you have a woman who cares for women issues as your president, because you know that you can go to her, talk about women's dilemmas, women's problems, and she understands, she sympathizes, and she makes things move.

We are delighted to have a group of women from the MENA region. We usually have here four or five women speaking, but this time we have the pleasure of welcoming 16 women from the region. So, the format this morning is that we will start with a panel, but I would like to invite the other members of the delegation to join in and give us their input.

Today's meeting is co-sponsored by the Women's Global -- Global Women's Leadership Initiative, which is run by my colleague Rangita de Alwis de Silva, and she will at some stage, I hope, talk about what the global -- the women's global initiative does. And also we thank Nicola [spelled phonetically] if she -- where is she? She's there. And who put us in touch with Karama and arranged for us to be able to host this meeting. We have for today's meeting 157 RSVPs, but I think the snow yesterday must have created some problems for our participants to reschedule the program.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we are launching today a publication called "Challenges to Women's

Security in the MENA Region." We have 42 contributors from 20 countries. Looking at this publication, the panelists will get each a copy of it when they leave, and the audience can pick up the link to this publication, but we send it by email this morning. Reading the contribution by these women from around the region, coming from the region, I felt a sense of gloom and doom and I tried to compare it our publication on the occasion of International Women's Day 2012, where there was a lot of hope and aspiration for the Arab Spring and what it will, you know, achieve for women. A year later, this is quite depressing. And you -- women express a sense of concern that there -- for their security on three fields: legal, social, and political. So I think this is going to be the topic of our conversation.

You have the bios of our speakers, so I won't take, again, more of your time to introduce them. Let me start with Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, former minister of tourism in the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, and currently she's a special representative to civil society for the League of Arab States, secretary general based in Jordan, and she just finished a book on CEDAW. Haifa, what do you think are the main challenges that women face in our region?

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:

Thank you, Haleh, and I would like to thank you for inviting us on this occasion, since we are celebrating, also, the international day. So I would like to congratulate all women in the whole world for this day, because usually we celebrate the achievements, but unfortunately now we are looking also at the challenges and difficulties that we are facing in our region. And it's really a sad day for so many women in our region. Since I don't want to talk about difficulties, our -- my colleagues, they will talk about the case studies in these countries.

But I believe security is one of the most important challenges that we are facing, especially if we are talking about political, economic, and social security. And, you know, the security for the person is the most important thing; sometimes more than food, even. And if food is one of the most -- if you look at it as a psychological issue, the Maslow hierarchy, we can see that the security issue is the most important and the top of the hierarchy of the needs of the person. So, if we look at the security in our region, we found out that there is a lack of security in so

many countries. So it's important to look at the security of women, also, because most of the time, even the support that we receive from our friends from all over the world went to several, you know, places, but none of them look at women needs at the same time. Any -- I remember that -- I'm representing Jordan in Arab organization. We send support to women -- Syrian women in [unintelligible] just for the needs of women, the special needs of women, because nobody looks at the needs of women. And also if we look at the region, there is the Palestinian woman issues, the Syrian, the Iraqi, the Libyan, all of these needs that we have.

Actually, this is the book that I would like to -- but this is the draft of the book that Karama -- and I would like to congratulate [unintelligible], because it was her idea that -- to look at what happened -- at the impact of CEDAW in Arab regions 30 years after CEDAW. And when we started putting this book, we found out that we end up of -- putting also a chapter about women in the Arab Spring. And yesterday we talk about it's not anymore Arab Spring for the women, it's like a nightmare for women in this region.

So, this book, we look at the impact of CEDAW in our -- in the women in the region at the legislation level, at the human rights level, the violence against women, the policy level, at the institutional level. And we found out that there is a lot of achievements happening. Twenty Arab countries out of 22 Arab countries ratified CEDAW. Most of them, they put some reservation, and some of them, they ratified CEDAW and put reservation all the items that contradict with either Sharia or their national legislation. So, some of them, they withdraw some of the items, or some of the -- one of the articles, like Jordan, the article on women movement because it contradicts with the constitution in Jordan.

So, most of the Arab countries, they have an excellent constitution. Now, so many countries in the Arab Spring, they are starting -- they're putting the -- drafting the new constitution, but I believe none of the women there are part of drafting the constitution, and this is one of the problems that we need to look carefully at, because none of them will look at the needs of women in the constitution. Also, the legislation, we have sometimes an excellent legislation, but we have difficulties in the implantation of the legislation on the ground.

Violence against women, still we have so many practices like honor killing and other kind of violences that we have, FGM in some countries in the region and other kind of violence. Now we have a new kind of violence. Our colleague will talk about it. It's a political violence that we have. Of course, by the end of this book we talk about agenda for change and how women can look at this agenda and how we can change so many practices that -- that was -- there was a negative impact on women in the region.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Thank you very much. Let's move to Zahra Langhi from Libya. She's the cofounder of Libyan Women's Platform for Peace. Challenges to women's security?

Zahra Langhi:

Yes. Thank you for having us, first of all, here. I would like to start with a note that -- yes, I will speak of the challenges, but I'd like to start with a note that the greatest opportunity here is that we, as women from the MENA region, for the very first time have transformed our role from mainly defending women's rights to becoming -- or struggling, at least, to become influential shapers of a new discourse on security. And this is the greatest opportunity.

Now, I will start speaking about the challenges, because there, after seeing women at the forefront of the revolution and equal participants in the revolution, and even the initiator of this revolution, we have been seeing systematic exclusion of women from the public sphere, and that is on the political and the legal level, as well as the social level. On the political -- on the legal level, we have seen before, and from the very first celebration in the -- of the liberation, we've seen the head of the NTC announcing a new era, and that new era is only characterized by -- there will be a change in legislation, i.e. there will be more permission of polygamy.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Polygamy, yeah --

Zahra Langhi:

And whatever our stance on polygamy, but it was a catalyst moment and it was symbolic of how they see women and how they see women's role in the coming era. The other thing

is -- was the representation of women. In the NTC, we only had two women at that time in the NTC, and we also saw in the first draft of the electoral law women were not even granted a quota. And it -- if it wasn't for the role of the civil society -- vigilant role of civil society, women's groups engaging with youth, as well as gender-sensitive legal experts, we wouldn't have had this change in the electoral law which ensured the representation of women, with -- and eventually we had 17.5 percent through the horizontal/vertical zipper list, the alternation between female and male candidates in the political list. So if it wasn't for women who are struggling after seeing our own exclusion from the policies on behalf of the decision makers.

We have -- our greatest challenge is the enforcement of the rule of law, and, especially now, as of this moment, Libya is going through a very, very critical moment in its transformation to state-building. And we have this problem of the so-called revolutionary legitimacy: the transformation from revolution to state-building. And we, as women, are keen to help and support this inclusive and just transition to inclusive democracy, not only to a democracy that is dependent on ballots or elections or the understanding of the majoritarian democracy; we are keen on having a fair transition to a democracy, we are keen on having a fair law of transitional justice that is gender-sensitive, as well. And all our efforts are being challenged, particularly by the existence of the militias, and they're non-abiding by the rule of law. And so, this is something that we have -- we are all, as Libyans, are facing and being challenged of, but it's always women that suffer more.

So, our greatest concern at the moment is to guarantee the enforcement of rule of law. However, on another level, we have been seeing systematic policies by the defense ministry to exclude women from the army; we have seen a policy by the health ministry not to include women -- raped women as injured of war. So we have seen -- been seeing a level -- policies by the state, as well as our challenges that we have been seeing through the lack of enforcement of the rule of law through these militias.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you very much. Let's move now to Azza Kamel, who is the founder and director of Appropriate Communication

Techniques for Development in Egypt and entrepreneur.
Azza, challenges?

Azza Kamel:

Thank you very much for having me. I try to concentrate, because my language not good, but I try to express myself in my way. I came from very, very bad situation in Egypt. Now, after we achieve -- or try to achieve our dream to have freedom, to have democracy, to have a good life, and Egyptian people very involved in the revolution: men, women, youths, every day, every moment. And suddenly we found some group destroying our revolution, kidnapped our dreams, started to destroy everything; no respect to law, destroy the constitution code, try to isolate the media or to attack media everywhere, and try to impose what you call Sharia and use religion to demand everything in our country. And this is, of course, [unintelligible] from different countries outside Egypt to support them very much, to try to implement -- what you call it? -- Islamic nation, not related to Egyptian nation.

And what happens is there is very bad political situation now in Egypt. The people didn't participate who drafted the constitution. There is absolutely a riot to the president to do whatever he wants. The citizenship destroyed -- there is no respect to any convention, international convention, even the convention mentioned in the constitution. And the women, they haven't any right inside the constitution, and the Islamic discourse attacks all the rights that we achieved before as women. And what happens, also, is there is a political violation against women, especially [unintelligible] in the squares, in the streets. There is harassment, there is kidnaps, there is torture, there is women raped everywhere, and we see, as a feminist and as an activist, this is not individual practices, but it's a systemic -- systematic action against women to stop involvement in the revolution. And until today there is violation everywhere across all the countries, and the people killed as individuals, as activists, as families, in Mansoura, in [unintelligible], not only in Cairo, not only in Tahrir Square.

[unintelligible] is the former representative from Cairo who came and speak about women rights inside the constitution, but there is no any rights to women in the constitution, even little things. And we have to be careful about anybody telling you that the new system gives

opportunities to women, because there is women representatives as Egyptian state here. And I think it's important to see that -- it's an important thing, the security and peace for citizenship in -- Egyptian citizens in Egypt, and also for women in Egypt. But I wanted to ask you as American citizen and as American politician, will you support the brave people fighting for the basic right in the street in Egypt now? Or where -- are you going to support the extremist people, and why the people kill in the streets with the tear gas being from U.S.?

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you, thank you. Let's move on to Faiza Mohamed, director of the Nairobi office of Equality Now in Somalia and Djibouti. Please.

Faiza Mohamed:

Thank you. First I just want to emphasize the linkage between the Arab region and Africa. We have a lot of Arab countries situated in Africa and they are major players in Africa, by that I mean the African Union level, and these are Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania. So that linkage exists and I think African Union level is a platform that Arab -- or the MENA region has to use to build solidarity and, you know, to continue to pressure the women to be held accountable.

I think what I would like to address in terms of challenges is from the political angle; political in the sense that, one, for example, security or police do actions that are human rights violation. Members of the state still threaten it. Instead of siding with the victim, they feel like they are the ones who are offended, you know? And I can give you the two examples we have seen. Tunisia, where the young woman was raped by the policeman and it's still being challenged. And also this one in Somalia where a journalist was taken victim -- you know, her story about rape by security officers, and while she was not only jailed. The journalist's still in jail. And so the notion that if, you know, a woman says, "I've been raped," that she's offending the state, you know, and no action being taken by the -- so that's the big challenge in terms of realizing women's security in the region.

The other thing is when a country's peaceful doesn't mean women are at peace. At their homes, there's a lot of domestic violence going on. Therefore, security's at risk

for most women at that level, as well. And so we need -- states need to build home security, neighborhood security, and then those building blocks will lead to a world security in our nations.

The other thing I would like us to put emphasis on: the lack of implementation of international conventions and regional conventions. And most countries feel, like, obliged to just sign or ratify international instruments and then shelve it away. And so that's a big concern for us. And at the Africa region, what has been happening is we crafted a homegrown protocol on rights of women, which groups have rallied around it to be the minimum standards on human rights that all states should adhere to. And if a state has better provisions for women, then that should override what's in these minimum standards, but all of them have to, you know, ratify in order to be obliged by. So we have been campaigning around that to ensure that all of them have ratified, and this campaign has been successful in securing 36 out of the 54 member states. And we are not leaving it like that again because if we just leave it at that, then still they will not implement. But the consistency's important and we are working closely with the African Union Commission and U.N. Women to ensure. And a lot -- a big part of these provisions include social security. How do you ensure -- so, as beneficiaries of the African Union, also -- Egypt, Libya can also use these instrument to push for security in the region.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you.

Faiza Mohamed:
Thank you.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you very much. Our final panelist is from Syria, and she is the deputy for the president of the Building the Syrian State. So that's -- we are very happy to have you. I know you are going to give us a very factual story of what really is happening on the ground, which is not at all pleasant, but --

Mouna Ghanem:
Thank you very much. It's my great pleasure to be here among you today. This morning, we listened to Jane giving us this very interesting opening. And when she mentioned

this feeling of grandmother, of insecurity, it just came to my mind, my mother, when she decided as a grandmother to take my two little boys and to go and seek asylum in one of the countries because she feel insecure in Syria.

Yes, national -- personal security is a national security. And we in Syria, we have -- insecure at three levels. The first level: in the political level. When the whole international community has supported the violence in my country, and they give the power to some countries, which is undemocratic, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia to destroy my infrastructure and my country. Violence now in Syria is causing insecurity for everybody. Violence in Syria is causing us a lot of worries because it's not going to take us to democracy. For me, coming from a very democratic movement, political movement, an opposition political movement, I feel insecure now. I feel insecure because what -- the things we started in March 2011, calling for democracy and freedom has been threatened by using arms and violence and giving back Syria to the Middle Ages by destroying all the cultural heritage and the infrastructure of the country. And this is going to get me nowhere.

Also, we feel very insecure on the economic level because the economic punishment you try and impose on my country didn't affect Assad and his family. It's affected only poor people. It's affected the breadwinners. It's affected the mother, the children. If you go to where I live, and it's a good area in Damascus, but there is -- the poor people come and stand lines. More than 100 women and children are standing hours to get two or three breads -- packets of breads -- because it's not available. It's very expensive. Assad doesn't care. He has his plan to bring bread and wine and caviar and what -- I don't think -- I mention caviar because the European Union has imposed economic sanction on caviar to bring us democracy to Syria.

[laughter]

This is not a joke. This is not a joke. This is not a joke. Just by imposing this, they give the Assad very strong card to play, because people who are civil servants, they just stick to the regime because they want to keep their salary. They want to live. They want to feed their children. And all of these people who are living inside Syria, they stick to the government, they stick to the regime because the regime is able to pay them. People

coming from hurt areas -- children and women are sleeping in the streets, in the gardens. Now you find so many children in the streets without families. Without families. They don't know where is their families. So the economic sanction which was imposed on my country, it didn't and it will not help us to achieve democracy. On the contrary, it strengthens the regime.

Also we feel very insecure on the sexual and physical level because all the countries where our women fled out of -- to escape from violence, they went to Jordan, they went to Turkey, they went Saudi Arabia -- were subject to different kind of physical and sexual abuse. I'm releasing a report tomorrow which talks about rape, about sexual harassment, about sexual trafficking which is happening in these countries, and especially in Turkey, where women are subject to sexual harassment by the Turkish policemen.

Also, we have so many -- we have the campaign with our sisters in Jordan to face this spread of forced marriage, child marriage. Also, now we have a new trend, which were -- there's a fatwa by the Islamist and Jihadist movement, which was brought to us by our good friends in Qatar and Turkey, that women can marry more than once as she wants in one day so that she can have sex -- legal sex -- and the marriage with more than one man at one day because the fighters who are coming to us from different countries in the war, they need to satisfy their sexual desires while they are fighting the regime in Syria. Would this take us to democracy? Would -- this takes us to modernization? It's a game. It's a game.

The issue in Syria is not simple. It's -- getting rid of the regime is not the ultimate goal; the ultimate goal is achieve democracy. And my enemy is not only the regime or Assad or whatever, my enemy is anybody who will hinder my struggle for democracy, whether it's regime-related or it's not regime-related. And this idea that I can now be allies with anybody to get rid of the regime, and then I will take care of the business, it shows. In different countries, like Egypt, that is not true. It's not how you get rid of that dictatorship; define what kind -- what system you're going to have in the future. And especially that the world has given some countries, especially United States, has given the upper hand for Qatar and Saudi Arabia to deal with the Syrian issue, and I think this is -- doesn't go with the role of United States as a democratic role model

country in the world. I think this is very dangerous, because insecurity in Syria will not affect only Syria. When the country goes into -- become a -- we have a civilization of Syria, I'm sorry my friend --

[laughter]

-- then the security -- insecurity will affect the whole region, will affect the conflict, the main conflict in the region. So the Arab/Israeli conflict would have a very bad implication on the whole world. When Assad says that, he mean it -- he meant it. And I think I agree with him, because he knows how it's complex, how the complicity of the society, of the political issues inside Syria.

So I think now the world now should -- especially superpowers should look -- should revisit the Syria case and think about the different way by supporting and encouraging the negotiation, the peaceful process, political process negotiation. It is only through a political -- peaceful, inclusive political process we will have peace. Otherwise, we will have an extended civil war.

One last point, that the world had did a big mistake when they support -- when they looked only of the Syrian opposition. And they forgot there is other Syrians who are not opposition, and they count. There are more than 5 million persons in Syria; they count, they are Syrian, and they should be partners in the coming -- in the transition and the future of Syria. Thank you very much.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you very much.

[applause]

I would like now to narrow the discussion a little bit, you know, and talk about my conclusion from reading this 42 opinion was that there is a sense of concern that women may use -- may lose some of the rights they had gained in -- during the previous regime, before the revolution.

So let's focus on that, you know, and then we will open the floor. Haifa, you mentioned that, in your paragraph you sent me, there is this concern that women may lose, you know, their previous -- there are the Egyptians who talk about it, too, you know, and other countries. And you talk

about Syria being a secular state and suddenly having to face all of these problems.

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:

Actually, Haleh, I'm writing now a book about women and democracy. And there is case studies about [unintelligible] from different countries, from Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, and, I believe, for Libya. There is a woman -- they are talking about their case studies. But when we look at the region I live in, we found out that woman rights lag behind now and there is a lot of achievements that happen in the region.

If we look at, for instance, Egypt, we found out the legislation there was -- one of the best legislation was on [unintelligible] and other -- in Tunisia, the Sharia law that they have. And now we are afraid that the new regime in these countries, they came out of an idea that this kind of legislation is for the previous regime, and we have to get right out of this legislation because it's against the family, and they want to destroy the family through this legislation.

So they want to amend all -- some of these legislations, they want to delete it. And this is very dangerous to look at it from this angle. So I thought -- sometimes, I told myself maybe we'll come out to the zero point. And I'm afraid -- I hope not woman in the Arab region to start struggling for their rights.

Now, after all the achievements that's happened, we don't want to stop and start the achievements that happened -- we don't want to start again from the zero point that our grandmothers and the previous, you know, generation started working to achieve what's happened. And this is one of the issues that we need to look at it carefully in the region. And if we look at a country -- I would like to talk a little bit about Jordan. Maybe Jordan, because we are surrounded by all these countries whom we called Arab Spring -- by the way, I know that the first person who will call it Arab Spring is President Obama. He called it Arab Spring because, of course, in that region we don't like Arab Spring. But he call it Arab Spring because it's lead by the youth. Spring is something shining about their people.

So we believe that it's important to look at -- if we look at Jordan, for instance, since we are surrounded by all these countries the king, he lead a white revolution in Jordan for the democratic reform, in order to do a -- similar steps. Now, we have the new parliament. The parliament now -- for the first time in the history of Jordan, they are choosing the prime minister and the cabinet, and of course they are fighting with each other for a month, because it's a new democracy for them; they don't know how to do it, the procedure. But it's the first time that we have a constitution committee. We have a committee for election, we have a court -- constitutional court. So we have a lot of steps towards democracy. But, of course, democracy and reform will not happen in one year. Or it's not a pill that we can take, and we said that it's a democracy. And democracy, it's not just what's happened in Egypt or Tunisia that they changed the regime, and now they are democratic. It's a process that will take years and years and years, maybe 50 years.

And look at the history, look at United States, look at Europe, so many countries in the world that they have democracy now. And I would like just also to mention that it's important to leave every country to choose their own democracy, not to import democracy from any country from abroad. We can't say that we can have the democracy that we have -- you have in the United States, that we can apply in Syria or Tunisia or any country in the region; they have to have their own democracy according to their needs, to their culture, to their society. Thank you.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Let me reword slightly my question and say what should women do to stop the clock for going back? And if I just give you the example of Iran: after the revolution, the first law that was suspended was the family protection law. So there is somehow -- in post-revolutionary countries, there is always the focus on women's rights. The economy is set aside, political rights set aside; they just focus on the little gains that women have made in the decades before. So let's start there.

Zahra Langhi:

Well --

Haleh Esfandiari:

What to do to stop going back?

Zahra Langhi:

First of all, I would like to see it as a -- in a framework what is happening, what is taking place. We are now transforming, as I said from the beginning, from the revolution to state-building and to peace. And the problem is they -- it's only they starting with women, but it is a whole philosophy. It is still the revolutionary philosophy. And this is why I agree with my friend Mouna, here.

It's -- we fought in these revolutions for values: freedom, justice, social justice, and dignity. And we toppled the regimes. And so we need, at this stage, not to be still in the phase of revolution and thinking in the revolutionary mindset, which is exclusionist. We need to move -- to transform into another phase, which is the phase of inclusive state-building. And this is why I think that women taking part in this phase is very much important.

We need -- women need to take part in gender equitable institutional reform. And institutional reform, it's the legislative, it's the judiciary system, it's the political system. We have seen now -- and this what actually Libya is going through at the moment, and many women are being threatened at the moment -- the parliamentarians that we fought so hard to put them there, they were threatened yesterday. And the -- actually, the head of GNC, there was an attempt to assassinate him yesterday, and the whole GNC was abducted just to sign the passing of a political isolation law: the De-Gaddafi-cation law.

We are seeing these patterns, the exclusionist patterns, in the name of revolutionary legitimacy. And so women who were supposed to -- yesterday, they were forced and threatened to be beaten up. You have to sign that law. And imagine when we will start drafting the constitution that many laws will be reputed as being tainted as Gaddafi's laws, as we have seen in Egypt. They said these are Susan Mubarak's laws.

So we are seeing a kind of a reversal of -- in our rights. It all goes with the revolutionary, exclusionist mindset. And this is why it's important to look into this. We are here, fighting and struggling on all levels to make sure that we have gender-equitable, participatory, inclusive state-building and institutional reform. Taking into

consideration the gender -- women's rights as an integral part of -- for human rights, as well.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Azza, what shall we do --

Azza Kamel:

I --

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- if at the end we should stay forever the age of marriage should not be lowered to nine. [unintelligible].

Azza Kamel:

[unintelligible]

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- introduced, polygamy will not --

Azza Kamel:

Yeah.

Haleh Esfandiari:

I mean just focus on these --

Azza Kamel:

Yeah, well --

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- issues.

Azza Kamel:

-- I think it's important that other women to struggle very much and to have -- to have very good rule in the political arena, and involved with -- more in political participation. And the first thing is that we have to change -- struggle to change is this election law to have some kind of quota, and also to struggle very much to keep the various laws that will give us some right, and organize ourselves [unintelligible] civil society, was [unintelligible] to be one body to achieve our civil state.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Mouna.

Azza Kamel:

And, of course, we need to change the constitution.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Yeah. Because it's the most important thing. Yeah.

Mouna Ghanem:

I think we should always think that gender issue is a political issue; it's not a woman issue. So we should look at the woman issue in the region or the gender issue in the region within the political perspective, a change is happening in the region and in the world.

So we should -- I think we should always involve ourselves more in politics, and not only to focus on just women issues, or FGM, or -- it's very important but it's related -- or how the whole political system looks at the woman, how the political system looks at the activist, at the citizens in the country. So we should involve ourselves from now in the transitional periods, in making the change, which should take us to right citizenship, and also then we can make very specific woman issues or gender-perspective issues.

So we should mainstream gender into politics. And to that end, I think now we should work very much -- and this is what we are doing now in Syria -- in the transitional period or in the peacemaking period. So we -- as a woman -- as a Syrian woman making peace, which our initiative launched together with our good friend, [unintelligible] in Egypt.

We want to be integrated in the Geneva statement, which was just approved by the Security Council, which talks about, it was -- it is like a road map for Syria to go to democracy. We should be in the details. We should also encourage women who think genderly, because not all the women are gender sensitive, and I think this is very important. And we should create a critical mass of these politicians -- women politicians who really are gender-sensitive. So we know -- all of us know a lot of women who are not gender sensitive and who are trying to -- not to give you a space because they are not gender sensitive, and because they put competition on the priority, and not to empower women who are around it.

So I think now we are in the very critical period of history where there is a lot of changes happening, at least in my region, and rearrangement of the powers in the world.

And also we talked yesterday about the changes happening in the role of the United Nations, and this is something else also need a lot of discussion.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Faiza, can you separate personal status law from political participation? Can one separate these two things? How is it possible?

Faiza Mohamed:

Absolutely.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Oh, you can. Oh.

Faiza Mohamed:

I think that's where most men would say personal law is where, you know, you just talk about women's issues and deny them the political space. But both should be addressed in within the context of what is best interest for a woman. And changes bring in opportunity. And if we don't have clear goals of what we want to gain, what we want to retain, what we want to change, and therefore if we don't organize and mobilize, we are going to be left on the side. And like Mouna said, you need to build a critical mass. And so we need to build a critical mass among the women, but also with the men who support and understand it from the woman's perspective.

So that is where we can, you know -- once we are seen as a constituency, then the -- and not like a few of us -- several organizations or what they will call elite women, and, you know, then they would use that against us. So we need to build those. And what happened in Egypt, for example, with all the women coming out, playing a big role in the revolution, and yet the situation has not advantaged for them. It's a good example that if we are not really organized, then we become just emotional and go with the wind of change, then, you know, we find ourselves torn out very fast. So we need to have deeper -- and --

Mouna Ghanem:

I would like to add something --

Haleh Esfandiari:

Yes.

Mouna Ghanem:

-- just from my experience. I used to work with some religious Muslim man in Syria, trying to change the personal code and the family code, which is very discriminatory in Syria. And he said -- I remember very clearly what he said to me: "Look, Mouna, don't play with it. This is our share in power, because that regime has taken the public life and left the private life for us. So we will continue to fight to keep the power we have inside our families as men, because we don't have power outside the house." So I'm saying that when everybody has his share in power as individuals, then it will be easier to change the personal code and the family code and all this discriminatory laws against women.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Okay. We are now going to open --

Mouna Ghamen:

Okay.

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- the floor to your comments. Lara [spelled phonetically], please?

Female Speaker:

Thank you. Hi, my --

Haleh Esfandiari:

And just wait for the mic, please. Thank you.

Female speaker:

Thank you. Lara, with Safadi Foundation. It's really an honor to be with you all this morning. Thank you. This is a wonderful event. My question is really simple: what do we do as western women to help you?

Recently, there was this awful story out of Saudi Arabia about this little girl, 5 years old, named Nemma [spelled phonetically], who was raped and beaten by her father. And I don't know what the legal process is right now; I think he's still in jail. But the idea that he could just go very easily really had me very upset. And I thought initially, "Do I just go stand in front of the Saudi embassy and go crazy?"

[laughter]

But, really, what do we do? What can we do, tangibly?
Thank you so much.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Who wants to take it? Azza?

Azza Kamel:
I think it's important that the western women make petition in their politician to let them don't support the government -- help vicious people to be out from justice. You know? And then, more than that, to appear that you refuse any kind of support from your government to help a vicious regime. I think this is very, very, very important to support us in this matter.

Haleh Esfandiari:
And just Haifa and then --

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:
I would like maybe to add on this that most of the countries who were report [unintelligible] most of the time there is the government report and the [unintelligible] report. And, actually, the government report, most of the time it's about achievements. And none of them -- sometimes they mention some of the other obstacles that they face, but the [unintelligible] report, most of the time they shed light on the issues that still exist in the country. I believe this kind of practice exists in so many countries in the world and I believe that most of the countries in the region, they receive support from the United States and from Europe from different countries. And it's important for these countries who sponsor development projects, et cetera, in these countries to put conditions on the country to -- for human rights fight. This is important because human rights file must be linked with economic fight. If you don't like it with the economic fight, they don't care, these countries. So, it's important to link these economic fights and economic contributions with the human rights fight and with the emphasis on woman rights.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Zahra?

Zahra Langhi:
Yeah. I think this particular case that you've just

mentioned, it's one of the cases of domestic violence that could have happened in any of the world. I think, nonetheless, that we as Arab women look forward from our partners in the international community to work together how to develop, first, clear strategies on how to implement the international conventions, CEDOW or 1325, for example. We need, as well, to work together how to pressure governments on implementing the international community itself. The U.N. itself has to implement itself these conventions. For example, we had a security meeting two weeks ago in Paris on security that was attended by Friends of Libya at the U.N., the E.U., and none -- not a single woman was in the delegation of our government and the E.U. or the U.N. or none of the international powers have made any mention of it. So if we don't see it from the international community itself abiding by these international conventions and implementing it, I don't think any -- how can we work together? We are now working together on building a mutual understanding and kind of a partnership, but we need to work furthermore on implementing this. This is the kind of lobbying that we'd like to see.

Mouna Ghanem:

Yes. We need your help in putting pressure on the American foreign policy on two issues for my country. The first one is to avoid this contradictory where they have -- for example, they have put Jabhat al-Nusra on the list of the terrorist country, but yet they still supporting the Syrian National Council, who says that Jabhat al-Nusra is part of the Syrian revolution. And they consider them as a representative of the Syrian people. This is -- makes a lot of worries for me, because this is my -- takes me to consider the whole Syrian as a terrorist people and I think this is a lot of contradictory.

The second thing: this would be -- I think this should be a call for all the woman, American, western, whoever care about human life -- American, the foreign policy -- the American foreign policy should reach an agreement with the Russian foreign policy. They should agree on the Syrian case. That's it. End of story. They should encourage negotiation. They should help us to get out of this crisis about this dramatic life we are living on a daily basis. When there is an agreement between America and Russia, there will be peace in Syria. It might take some time, but we will reach peace.

Now, all the conflicts is related because some people are with the Russian, their regime, and others are supported by the American, and everybody is playing cards on the table without reaching an agreement. I think it's high time now to reach an agreement. We have 200 people killed every day. We have one million refugees. We have so many women who are raped, abused, and we don't know the numbers, or even killed by their families because they were raped because there's a stigma. It's high time now that the super powers reach an agreement to solve the -- Syria. It's a stigma. What's happening in Syria is the middle age. It's something very backwards. I mean, photos which we saw the people who are fighting, coming from everywhere just reminds us by prehistorical period. So I think this is two issues. I think this is very important for you to - - for us to help us on this. Thank you very much.

Haleh Esfandiari:

I think, if I understood Lara correctly, she was focusing on women's issues and not the crisis in Syria. We have had at the Wilson Center a number of meetings on --

Mouna Ghanem:

Okay.

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- Syria. So I really would like to ask --

Mouna Ghanem:

Yeah, but I don't want to separate.

Haleh Esfandiari:

-- [unintelligible] -- that was fine what you said, but I would like us to use this opportunity and really discuss --

Mouna Ghanem:

Yes, yes, but violence used by the fighting group.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Sure.

Mouna Ghanem:

The army which come to my country from Qatar is causing violation for women.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Sure.

Mouna Ghanem:
And taking me back to prehistorical -- because I'm losing my rights now because all of this mindset are coming inside the country.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Sure. Thank you. Faiza?

Faiza Mohamed:
In the case of violations like that, it's important to hold governments accountable and make sure that the perpetrators, whether it's the father or a brother or somebody unknown to the young girl or woman, whichever the case might be, should be held accountable. And to use those opportunities also to make change, to have stronger law that will protect the rights of young girls. And so we mobilize international public pressure and we initiate international campaign which gives people like you to get involved and start pressuring the king, in this case, to take action. And the important thing is not to -- you know, to stay consistently following up until they deliver on it and so we make sure they do that.

Haleh Esfandiari:
The lady in the back. Oh, I'm sorry. I would like to give the floor to the member of the delegation. Yes, please, and then the lady.

Female Speaker:
I'm not with the delegate.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Yeah.

Female Speaker:
My name is [unintelligible]. I'm from Chile, but I am from Palestinian origin and I have been following all the process in the Middle East from very near. I went even to Egypt for the first election, parliamentary election, as an international observer. I wanted to ask about the organization of women, if they are united? If you have -- if in the different countries, if you have a program? I mean, we had to fight against a dictatorship in Chile. And what we did do -- all the groups of women from the

opposition, we united and we prepared the program of what changes we wanted in different areas. And later when we won, we had -- well, several changes that were done that were very important. But it was very important to be united from just the left to the right. All the women, we were working together. And it's very important when it is -- the first time at least -- to have one issue that is going to be the issue that you're going to fight for. Is it the change of the constitution? Is it -- whatever it is you think it's more important in your country. I know that the religion is a thing that is very important that makes a difference with what we fought, we lived, but I think the most important thing is how you work together, I mean, in the different countries and how you fight for one thing that is in the agenda.

Azza Kamel:

I agree with you, of course, and this is very important. And from the beginning of the revolution, there is many, many coalitions and the coordination between the different groups even during the drafting of the constitutions, the women introduced many, many submission for the committee and they made lobbying and pressure. We learned from this revolution that the only thing is that you can take a good step is that you have to unite. I agree with you and there is a step and this is not.

Female Speaker:

I mean, are the women united?

Azza Kamel:

Yeah, we try. Not all, but more than before, more than the revolution because the reality -- I mean, give us -- this is the sea of opportunities to make that because we can't work alone, even you can't work without cooperation with women committees and different parties, you know? So we try to cooperate with different human rights organization, women's organization, activists, parties, you know, and we learned during the revolution that nobody can work alone. We can't.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Okay. Marena [spelled phonetically]?

Male Speaker:

Thank you. The Arab societies right now are very deeply divided between secularists and Islamists, and women are

divided between secularists and Islamists, that there are a lot of women who, for better or for worse, vote for the Islamists parties, that support the Islamist parties and so on.

Most women organizations, certainly the ones that come to speak in the west, represent the secular side. And my question is, is there any way in which women across that divide have common interests and can work together for some common interest? Because it seems to me that this divide weakens the women's movement in a tremendous way.

[talking simultaneously]

Zahra Langhi:

I'm a woman who comes in the west and speaks to the west and I don't consider myself a secularist, nor do I consider myself a political Islamist, okay? And I think that we need to transcend binaries, and this binary between the secularists and Islamists is somehow superimposed on us, and we have seen how woman suffered a lot in the case of -- particularly Egypt -- from this binary, and they lost it. But I think now we are building coalitions in Libya. The scenario is completely different. For example, I take you -- the movement that we've created, the Libyan Woman's Platform for Peace, which is actually in partnership with Karama, which all this delegation -- you can see that there are shades of differences here in between us. This is the kind of regional coalition and we have a national coalition because I think we only want to build peace, and peace is about building consensus. And we don't want to alienate, not the Islamic discourse, and we even try to get on our side the most gender-sensitive, enlightened, religious scholars on our side. We have on our side the secularists, as well. It is more focusing on the mental issues, on peace-building processes. It's more inclusive, and I think we win if we follow that way.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Okay, Mouna.

Mouna Ghanem:

Yes, from my experience within the Syrian Women's Platform for Peace, we have so many religious women are coming back from a religious school and we work together. Today in the media, we have done a campaign on the 8th of March, it's called Peace for Syria. The photos was for a real Muslim

woman, and she's known to be a granddaughter for the most important religious man in the history of Syria. She's a member of our organization. She was holding this, saying, "Peace for Syria." So there is ways, but what is important for me: just the women get together and they would be able to make change. On the women issues, when you have the right and appropriate legal contacts, and then you can work with -- not with very conservative's movement, but you can work with the people who are in the middle.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Okay. Thank you.

Azza Kamel:
I wanted to --

Haleh Esfandiari:
Yeah, sure.

Azza Kamel:
We have to negotiate between political Islam and the Muslim people, you know? All the revolution, all the Muslim people, Christian, participate in the revolution, even the women. You find the veiled women, unveiled women, everything, but there is no -- what you call it -- Islamist women and the secular women. The only women under the political Islam, again, are completely against women's right. All the women inside the parliament [unintelligible] others -- those women against all the law that give rights for women. They invite to polygamy, they -- with -- what you call it -- [unintelligible] -- they invite the women to stay in the home, everything, because they only implement what the Islamic leader sees.

But all the people in Egypt -- women in Egypt involved in the revolution, not only -- because meaning of secular are different even in our country. It's not against religion, you know? I am a Muslim, but I am not veiled, you know? And I cooperate with veiled women and their [unintelligible] and everything. And we are against the political Islam. So we have to differentiate between this and that. So, in Egypt, as Mouna and Azza are saying, you will find everyone cooperates together, but this is women that are against a secular state, against the women's rights. Of course, there is no -- any ground between us, you know? And this is very important that the people know that, because they try to -- it's reported that the secular

women against religion. You know what? All the Egyptian law practiced Sharia before the revolution, you know? It's not true that there is no Sharia in Egyptian law, but this is what they want. And, believe me, they didn't care about religion, even the Islamic people. They want only to demand everything.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Okay. In the back. The lady in white, please.

Female Speaker:

Hi. Excuse me. I have a little hoarse voice. I have a little cold, but y name is Asea [spelled phonetically] and I'm a professor at American University.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Can you speak louder?

Female Speaker:

Sure. I'll try. My voice is a little hoarse.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Okay.

Female Speaker:

Sorry for that. I have a little cold. My name is Asea and I'm a professor at American University. I've been living in Cairo for about two years. I just came back in May, so I've experienced the whole transition of the revolution and after. My first question is addressed to Zahra Langhi. In particular, I spent a lot of time in the last seven months when I was in Egypt with Gaddafi loyalists in Cairo and I want to hear -- and also maybe Syria -- if you can contribute to this because I think this is going to become the situation with the Alawites if al-Assad's regime falls. I spent a lot of time with these young Gaddafi loyalists who were all under the age of 30, most under the age of 25. And I want to know, from a woman's perspective, how will you seek to reintegrate these young men who are all over the world, from Egypt, and Tunis, and Europe, and many of them have suffered war casualties? How are they going to stop the cycle of revenge which is going on in Libya? They're fighting in Cairo between the Gaddafi loyalists and those who were fighting in the opposition --

Haleh Esfandiari:

Can I ask you to keep it very brief because we have many other questions.

Female Speaker:
Oh, okay.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you.

Female Speaker:
Okay. Well, my question is, you know, how are you going to seek to reintegrate these young men? Because, you know, they will seek to continue to undermine the government in a new society and also maybe you want to comment on Syria, also.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you. Zahra.

Zahra Langhi:
Thank you. I might -- I must say before answering your question that I come from a background -- I was in exile for 33 years and my family were political members of the opposition and I now totally against the de-Gadaffi-cation law and the political isolation law. I feel it is time for Libya to heal its wounds. I feel that the constitution should be inclusive and build on an equal, inclusive concept of citizenship for all and there have been efforts by the government for national reconciliation recently. There have been established two weeks ago an office for the refugees to help those who are tainted, I'm sorry to say that, as Gaddafi loyalists, to grant them protection and to go back home. It is really difficult. There are a lot of people who have been at the forefront fighting for this revolution, but because of tribal affiliations -- like in the case of Bani Walid and a particular case of the woman who was even fighting while she was pregnant. Now she is seeking asylum in the west. She is now in Tunisia. Her life is threatened. There are many cases like this. And I'm very sad to see this happening after a revolution that we fought for human rights.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Thank you very much.

Mouna Ghanem:
I think -- for the case of Syria, I think now it's high

time that we learn from our experience, as my friend Zahra has mentioned. De-Baath-ification, which happened in Iraq -- and I see Syria and Iraq very similar -- proved to be a very wrong mistake. And now there is many think tanks releasing this reports how the decision was made, it was wrong because it has taken the country into a very sectarian conflict. And in Syria, I think it's not only the Alawites who will be part of this, but also you have so many minorities and you have also supporters of the regime who are not -- who are belonging to the Sunni sect. So I think this is why we are calling for a peaceful, inclusive transitional process which takes into consideration the interests of everybody in the future of Syria. And those who are supporting the regime now should understand that they are a partner, and an important partner, in the future of Syria. Otherwise, the civil wars will continue forever.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you very much. Zainab, please, in the back. We are moving to the front.

Zainab Al-Suwaij:

Thank you very much. It's very interesting to hear all of the comments from different countries. It's always -- Haleh, you're great in putting these events together and bringing different perspectives. My name is Zainab Al-Suwaij. I'm the executive director of the American Islamic Congress. My question is for Mouna. Lessons learned from the Arab Spring and -- in different countries and how women's rights in many of these countries have been declined. What are the measures that the Syrian opposition are taking into consideration to enhance women's rights in the upcoming period of time after the fall of the Syrian regime?

Haleh Esfandiari:

Mouna?

Mouna Ghanem:

Okay. Well, I'm sure you are aware about the situation of the Syrian opposition, where we have the national coalition which is an external opposition, and we have two groups inside Syria -- the main two groups inside Syria, who are the Syrian Building State Movement and the Syrian Coordinating Committee. And, unfortunately, the coalition didn't give women's issue any attention. On the contrary, when the national council, which is the main part of the

coalition, included some women in the beginning, members of this council has harassed and abused the political rights of these women and put them into political scandal and they pushed them to leave the council. So, this is one issue we are fighting against.

I come from a movement which woman has a high voice there. I mean, I'm the deputy of the president and also we have -- we were the first political opposition to have a woman-affiliated organization to this position, which is the Forum for Women and Democracy, which I am the coordinator for it. I think now the world has realized that women's issues has been forgot in the Syrian case and there's a lot of attempts to do this and that, but I think -- I don't think that any of the opposition forces has a really clear road map for women's issues in the coming, unfortunately.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Heba [spelled phonetically] had a question -- or had a comment. Heba, you do?

Female Speaker:

It was a long time ago, but I just wanted to say --

Haleh Esfandiari:

Can you wait for the mic, please?

Female Speaker:

I just wanted to say that anybody who thinks that women's rights is not a foreign policy issue is absolutely, you know, wrong. The reason this delegation is coming here is to say, "Look, if you really are going to make a decision about any of these countries -- if you're going to support Egypt, you're going to support Syria, or Libya, or whatever, you need to make your decision on informed -- you know, having informed information." So, one, if a country is persistently and consistently disregarding inclusive constitution, that's not a democratic country. If a country consistently and insistently leaving the woman behind, that's not democracy. If the Muslim Brotherhood or, you know, numbers of them are coming here telling the U.S. Government, "Oh, we have, you know, a place for the woman," and all that, that is not true.

So the point of this whole delegation is it's a symbolic, you know, trip. It's, you know, just basically saying, "Look, women's rights are a foreign policy issue." It's a

foreign policy issue because it -- elections are affecting who's going to run, who are these policymakers going to be? A constitution is going to determine where the woman -- what role the woman is going to play. It has -- the revolutions have -- actually have given woman an opportunity because the revolutions happened because 77 percent or 80 percent of the women were supporting at the forefront. And now it's those women who are leaving behind. That's one.

Two: the governments that are going through, you know, other changes, not necessarily revolutions, are also not implementing the international conventions. And right now in countries, let's say -- you know, that are -- like Somalia, that's just, I think -- you know, has for the first time an elected government. Or Egypt -- we just came from New York on a commission on the status of women and there are 17 countries, which includes -- you know, it includes Bahrain, it includes Iran, it includes Egypt, it includes Pakistan, and Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, many countries that are supported by the United States who are absolutely building a block on women's rights. Whether is her productive right, whether it's a child marriage, and they're using words like "implementable." And then they're also using the culture and saying this is our culture and tradition. There is no place for abuse for women in any culture or -- in any culture. So -- and tradition.

So this is exactly what it is. It is a foreign policy. We're here -- we're not here to tell everyone, oh, you know, the usual story. We're all -- "they're forcing us to hijab or not hijab." We do realize our power. Inside, we are going to bring change within. We just want the pressure at the international level because we realize these governments want to build that international image, to come out as democratic and fair to women. And what we are saying is that's not true. We do our fight, but please do pressure these governments that you are supporting, link it with economic packages that you are giving, and this is all it is. It is a security issue, it is a political issue, and it is a foreign policy issue.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Thank you very much. I'll take two questions in the back, yes, and then the lady and then we'll just end the meeting.

Shelby Quast:

Hi, I'm Shelby Quast with Equality Now, and I wanted to say one thing. The United States just celebrated the first anniversary of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. And that came about by civil society organizations pressuring the U.S. Government. I see some of my colleagues in the room here. And it's important that they be held accountable, like any other country that has a national action plan on women, peace, and security, that they be held accountable to foreign policy issues. So that's one, and I encourage this delegation to stay in contact with civil society working groups that are holding their countries accountable to focus on women, peace, and security. And I also highlight other tools. For example, human rights reports in the United States that look at each country, that we are pressuring all those tools be used because that type of foreign policy affects every program in the United States. So, again, I know you're meeting with high-level officials and I just encourage you to push that home and help the U.S. be accountable for their promises.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Haifa?

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:

I would like just to talk about two issues. The first issue is about women, peace, and security. Now, in our region, none of the Arab countries, they did an action plan. And I'm glad that the United States -- I know that they did an action plan. But now we did -- now established -- or we published a regional statute for women, peace, and security and it was an effort between League of Arab States of [unintelligible]. And it will be launched next month. And I hope after this, Arab countries will start taking an action plan, especially on the resolution -- U.N. resolution 1725.

On the other hand, if you look at the [unintelligible] and the CSW now, a lot of events. And the important thing are these -- the delegation -- the official delegation. Listen to the civil society. There was a lot of contribution of civil society. A lot of them, they issue, you know, the recommendation, they issue so many papers. Now, the important thing, did any of these official delegations look

-- have a look about these, you know, papers and concept notes or the recommendation out of this civil society.

So, we end up talking about how we can as a civil society link our effort together and have this kind of networking, much less the issue every time a recommendation from each civil society in the -- look at how many events [unintelligible]. You can't attend all these. You have to run all the time to attend all these civil society and they are raising a lot of events and it's really important, but none of the delegation -- official delegation participated readily. They participated on these events. Yesterday, Karama, one of the head of delegation of Egypt, she participated on this very important note. So, this is very important to look at how we can, in a civil society, contribute to the official delegation, especially the last report that will come out of the CSW. As [unintelligible] mentioned, the United States and Europe, they are supporting these countries who are against so many recommendation out of the CSW.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Kathleen? Here.

Female Speaker:

[inaudible]

Haleh Esfandiari:

I don't think is working.

Male Speaker:

Excuse me.

Kathleen Kuehnast:

Hello? Okay.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Yeah.

Kathleen Kuehnast:

Hello, Kathleen Kuehnast, the Institute of Peace. First of all, I want to congratulate Haleh and the Wilson Center for really acting on their mission of open dialogue. I think it's critical that women across the region are voicing their concerns, and this engagement is a part of, as you say, the inclusive transition. And I want to really recognize each of your voices. One of the things that I've

been thinking about through the discussion today is I do see civil action happening here and I do see actionable ideas, but I also want to reflect for a minute only on research, because one of the ways that Haleh and I met many years was around central Asian women, and the very first thing that happened after the Soviet collapse was the legalization of polygamy. There are patterns here. What can we learn from these patterns across the countries? And to engage in how we can, as you put so well, Mouna, the public/private power struggle that's going on here, because sometimes it's our framing that is problematic in our discussion. And I think you've brought out very critical parts of that story here. So I wanted to know what other actionable ideas are happening in your region across -- I mean, Haleh does great work here, but what's happening in your region to keep these dialogues going?

Mouna Ghanem:

I will start. I just want to tell you that we have launched last month a new center for -- it's called Peace-building and Democratic Think Tank, which is based in Damascus. And if you are interested, we can send you our newsletter. And the purpose of this center is to encourage research and capacity-building towards building peace and also achieving democracy. And there will be many research. As to this, I mentioned once, which -- the first one's about rape and the second one will be about the economical obstacles toward achieving democracy in Syria. We will be releasing it very soon. So we are -- we agree -- I agree with you on the importance of the research to -- if you are a politician or if you want to be involved in the political life, you need to have the informed information, as my good friend Heba has stated.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Anybody else? Okay.

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:

Yeah, I would like maybe to mention, since we are -- the United Nations, now they are looking at the MDG [spelled phonetically] -- post-MDG 2015. It's important for all of us because now most of the countries, they are working on what we want. It's very important to look at the topics that we need to look at in the MDG, and all of these topics is about peace and security now, emerging issues in the region. And there was in Jordan a meeting by Karama for the [unintelligible] in the Arab region to come out of --

consists, you know -- are topics that we need, as Arab women, to address during the MDG. And I hope that you will listen not just to themselves and member countries, also to listen to this [unintelligible] voice.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Yes, last question here, because my panel is start -- two more: one in the front and then the panelists are freezing.

[laughter]

I know, they are all --

Haifa Abu Ghazaleh:

It's more freezing than outside.

[laughter]

Female Speaker:

Thank you so much. I'm Nahilliwah [spelled phonetically] from Jordan, Karama. Really, I don't want to ask, but I want to mention two points shortly. The first one, that we -- while we are talking about security. I believe, with you and all our friends, and agree that security is a women issue; that's why we should talk about Palestinian women security while we are talking about the last occupation in the world and in the century. This is the first. The second point, that democracy is global and human rights is global, sustainable for everyone, everybody, any time. Because this is the excuse that Arab regimes or our governments use it when they are not ratified for the women conventions or the -- or implement these conventions. We should talk and -- which -- or these governments and regimes are supported from the USA and the Europe countries. We should say it or -- how we can say it? [speaks French]. Yeah. That democracy is global; there is no democracy for Arab world and democracy for the foreign world or the European or American. Thank you so much.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Thank you. Last comment, question. Remember -- please. And identify yourself.

Female Speaker:

Good morning. I'm [unintelligible] -- I'm from Morocco and I'm with a delegation, Karama delegation. Just excuse my English, because --

Haleh Esfandiari:
That's fine.

Female Speaker:
So, just, I want to say about our experience in Morocco.
In Morocco, all people say it's different situation, it's
more better of the other countries, et cetera, et cetera.
You have in constitution very good, favorable for women;
you have democracy --

Female Speaker:
The [unintelligible].

Female Speaker:
But we have to Islamic government, and we are afraid
because if you -- we have a good constitution and if this
constitution doesn't be [speaks French] -- yes?

Haleh Esfandiari:
Apply.

[talking simultaneously]

Female Speaker:
-- apply, it doesn't matter. So, when there is a speech
for all governments, European, American government, "No,
Morocco is different," it's -- our government say, "Okay,"
you know? Our government said, "We are the better, so no
problem."

Haleh Esfandiari:
Based on what they hear from the west?

Female Speaker:
Yes. So no problem.

Haleh Esfandiari:
Sure.

Female Speaker:
Please be careful.

[laughter]

Be careful because don't forget us. And we need the application of our constitution. This constitution is the result of -- [speaks French] --

Haleh Esfandiari:

The combat? The fight?

Female Speaker:

Fight of women -- militant --

Haleh Esfandiari:

The one-million [unintelligible] --

Female Speaker:

-- activist women in Morocco. Thank you.

Haleh Esfandiari:

Yeah. Thank you very much. The reason why now everybody focuses on Morocco is that Tunisia is in such a, you know, shaky -- until the Arab Spring, everybody would refer to Tunisia as having one of the most progressive, personal status, and the women's participation, especially since Tunisia during the transitional period removed the reservation from Syria, so therefore -- but now that Tunisia is iffy, everybody focuses on what Morocco has to offer.

Please join me in thanking the panelists, and a special thank to Karama who gave us the opportunity to be able to have this discussion, and to Nicola, who was the go-between. Thank you very much.

[applause]

[end of transcript]