



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
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**Dawn Calabria
Senior Advisor, Refugees International**

A Status Report on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan

Patricia Ellis: Good afternoon everyone and thank you all for coming. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We have a lot of new faces here, which is great. We promote women's leadership and women's voices on all the pressing issues of the day, such as our program today on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. We're very pleased that everyone could come out. It's a very busy time in town, as I guess most of you know, President Mubarak has stepped down. It just happened, so there's a lot going on. We will have a program very shortly on Egypt, so I hope you'll be able to join us for that. We're really fortunate today to hear from a real expert on refugees, statelessness, aid, displaced populations, resettlement, and asylum. I'm happy to say it's a friend of mine and a member of our board—actually an officer of our board—Dawn Calabria, who has worked on these issues for many years, on Capitol Hill, at the UN, in the NGO world, and currently as a senior advisor at Refugees International.

In November, she spent three weeks in Afghanistan and during that time, she was in Kabul, Mazar, and Jalalabad. She was there to explore the humanitarian situation of those displaced by conflict and also to examine the situation of those returning refugees coming back from Pakistan and Iran. She says that there's a total of about 5.5 million, but in 2010 alone 150,000 came. She'll talk more about that. She was also there to look at the UN and NGO plans going forward into 2011. We're just really lucky to have her.

Just one more word before we go to Dawn, let me talk about some of our upcoming events. We recently had a great event on Foreign Policy and National Security Challenges for the Administration with David Sanger and Karen DeYoung and that was really a terrific event. And we are doing the Egypt event. Every year we hold an event on International Women's Day, and we will be joining with our partners from the UN and the UN Foundation on March 8th, so that's another special event. Lastly, this is our 15th anniversary, so we're very excited and we're celebrating that throughout the year. We hope that you will be able to join us as a member—come to our events and participate in that because that's quite a landmark for an NGO. So without further adieu, I'd like to turn it over to Dawn, and after Dawn speaks then we'll open it up for questions. We look forward to having a good dialogue today with all of you, so thanks for coming. [*Applause.*]

Dawn Calabia: Thank you very much, Patricia. It's a great pleasure to be with the Women's Foreign Policy Group and for all of you to come and give up your lunch hours. When you come into an audience like this—I am not an Afghanistan expert, I had the privilege of working on Afghanistan when I was with the House Foreign Affairs Committee. At that point the lens was about the Soviet occupation of the country, which of course began in 1979. I've also had the privilege of working with Afghan refugees that got resettled to the United States—I was with US Catholic Conference at that point. Then I worked for UNHCR and the UN Department of Public Information and the whole question of the transition of the times in Afghanistan. The sad time of the civil war in the country after the Russians left, the rule under the Taliban, the valiant efforts that many American NGOs—including some in this building—did to provide services to women and families in Afghanistan despite the rule of the Taliban and to try to keep education going at small schools in people's houses and to give people hope for the future. I work for a small NGO called Refugees International. It was founded by a woman, and I thought that would be particularly important to tell you today. It was a woman who was with her husband—a businessman—in Southeast Asia and Vietnam when the refugee exodus occurred. She was very taken by the plight of individuals and the sad pictures that you saw on television. It was before CNN so we didn't have instant news coverage all the time; but you did get pictures showing up in the Thai press and the Japanese press. She felt she had to do something; so she founded an organization and called it Refugees International. She's still on our board of directors; she's still pushing us to do more, and she's still out there saying "one person can make a difference."

One person can make an enormous difference. Pat Ellis was one of the founders of the Women's Foreign Policy Group because she too believed that women could make a difference and that women getting together and working together, and helping each other to grow and develop and network would be a good thing—particularly in an age when getting in the Council on Foreign Relations, you had to be an extraordinary, extraordinary woman whom five people said you were extraordinary and you should be considered for membership. So we can, each one of you can make a difference in what you do. You may not see the opportunities today, but if you keep at them, you will be able to do it, particularly if you are able to join organizations and work in coalitions because that's how a lot of things get done. Please, use your voice at every opportunity you have on the issues that are near and dear to you. In my case, I got interested in refugee issues. As I said, I studied Afghanistan when I was in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I was privileged to go out to Pakistan a number of times and go up to the border with Peshawar and go up to the border and sort of step across and come back across. I was in the motor entourage with Charlie Wilson—those of you who have seen Charlie Wilson's War—he was five times more outrageous than that movie made him out to be; but he got a lot done because he really believed that we really had to help the Afghans. Unfortunately, he wasn't listened to until after the war was over, until after the Russians left and we sort of forgot.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was founded in 2004. By that point, there were over 8 million Afghans outside the country who were registered as refugees, primarily in Pakistan and in Iran. For the most part, those who went to Pakistan lived in camps. In Iran, they did not do that. They were allowed to live more freely in the society and work in most instances. The Iran-Iraq War was going on through some of that time, so I'm sure the government was grateful to have some extra workers in the country. With the emergence of the new state of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2004, the whole quest was on for the countries in the region to send

the Afghans home. Many, many Afghans were anxious to go home. Pakistan, to make sure, in some cases, closed the camps. There were unexplainable fires and situations that convinced a lot of Afghans that it was time to go home. So, as Pat mentioned, we think about 5.6 million Afghans have come home. We know there's still about 1.7 million Afghans still registered in Pakistan. Pakistan this year decided to permit the re-registration of Afghans after saying in 2009 and 2010 that they were all going to have to go home. But they decided, given the conditions inside the country, they could stay if they were already registered, but that they had to comply with Pakistani laws.

We think that Afghanistan today has a population of about 29 million people. I say we think because there hasn't been an official census in a long time. The State Department estimates that the per capita income in Afghanistan is \$800; the *CIA World Factbook* says \$1000, so obviously we think it's somewhere between \$800 and \$1000. Why is that important? Afghanistan is a very poor, very underdeveloped country. If there had never been a Taliban, if there had never been problems in the country like that, it would still be eligible for international development assistance. Obviously in the current climate it's been an especially difficult period for them. 36% of the population is officially indicated as poor. And that's in a country with \$1000 per capita income. The life expectancy is 44 years, very low. It has the second-highest infant mortality rate in the world. One in every five babies dies before the age of five. It also has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Since 2004, the government has made strides, however. At one point there were only 900,000 children in school in Afghanistan; now there are over 6 million, which is wonderful, and a third of those are probably girls. But that still means that half the children in the country are not in school. In some cases it's because the schools don't exist; in some cases it's too far for the children to walk. When you're in Mazar-i-Sharif one of the interesting things that you see at 8:00 in the morning and at 12:00, are kids walking to school with their chairs. "Why are they carrying plastic chairs?" I asked the driver, and he said to me, "Well, because they need something to sit on when they get to school." And I said, "Isn't there any furniture in the schools?" and he said, "No." I said, "Do the teachers carry their chairs?" "Oh," he said, "I think there are chairs for the teachers... at least I think so." But he was very glad his children had a school to go to now. The schools were on double shifts. In some parts of the country, they were almost on triple shifts.

Refugees International has been going to Afghanistan since 2004 or 2005. We spent a lot of time in the camps in Pakistan. It was very difficult for us to visit Iran officially, so we don't have any official visits to Iran in the early days. We've been trying to understand what's been going on in the country and what the current situation is for people who've returned. One of the things that's understandable, but depressing, is that out of the 5.6 million people who came home, officially assisted by the UN High Commissioner of Refugees, aided largely by the United States and some other governments, many of those people have not been able to make it. As one family explained it to me, when we left for Pakistan, we were a family of three. We came back as a family of 12. We came back to our former house, which we were able to occupy, but it had only two rooms and it was much too small. Their garden was too small to support the number of people in the family, so they migrated to the cities—which is what's happened increasingly in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a number of informal settlements around its major cities. The three that I visited were examples: Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Jalalabad. These informal settlements, many places would be called squatter villages, slums, other words used that could be used describe them. But

there are the opportunities that people have taken to be someplace where they thought they had better access to services. And being out in the countryside where they there were possibly better opportunities for work, with opportunities to access clean water—which is a major need for two-thirds of the population of Afghanistan—and where they hope their lives would be better. Afghanistan's government has been unable, unwilling to deal with the influx. There are restrictions. There are some regulations on what kind of buildings you can build here or there. But the government for the most part has not been able to enforce them or is unwilling to enforce them. They recognize that people have to have some place to live. On the other hand, if squatters are on private land, they will not permit aid agencies or NGOs to make any permanent improvements on the land, understandable. Also, they do not want squatters or informal settlements on government land, in case they have other uses for it. You particularly don't want government buildings to be taken over—which sometimes happens after natural disasters or after conflict situations. So they know they have this part, but they haven't figured out what to do about it—and meanwhile, lots and lots of people living in areas with no services. Afghanistan, in cities such as Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif there's now electricity. You can see the transition line coming in from Uzbekistan, and it is very impressive. There's also a substantial amount of road construction that has gone on in the country—roads that were severely need for the development of the country. When you look at the question what kind of shelter expansion there has been in the country. The answer is very little. When you look at what kind of economic development activities that have taken place, the answer is very little. And so for many of the returning refugees and the internally displaced because of natural disasters that strike Afghanistan, and this is a country that gets everything. It has earthquakes, droughts, landslides, and winter blizzards that cut off access to large parts of the country. So much so that about 400,000 people displaced each year because of those natural disasters. While I was in Kabul, it was hit by an earthquake. No big deal. It came over the radio, but people just ignored it. It was a very low seismic shock. The fear is what will happen if there is a big natural disaster.

So what's happening in Afghanistan? Well, the good news is obviously with the second presidential election and a second parliamentary election. The bad news is there were charges of widespread corruption, dissatisfaction with the results. As a result, the Independent Election Commission took from September to November to certify the outcome of that election. And still some people are very unhappy about the elections and about them not gaining seats in parliament. The good news is that a number of women ran as candidates. National Democratic Institute ran a school for candidates of all political persuasions—anybody who wanted to come. They had 264 takers. At one point over 600 women expressed interest in running for elections. They were willing to have their pictures unveiled on posters, which you see around the city. They were willing to go on television and talk about their candidacy, and to speak on radio. Some were very traditional and wore burqas; so those were the pictures that you see posted. But these are women who are stepping up and saying we want to do something about the future of our country. And I think the women of Afghanistan are particularly impressive. Pat hosted a luncheon, I think about six years ago, five years ago, where we had a large delegation of Afghan women who came to the United States and they spoke about their desires. The time during the drafting of the constitution, they were part of the Loya Jirga [Grand Council]. They were fairly eloquent in what they believed and passionate about their commitment to the future—and so that passion remains.

But there are lots of problems in the country. The US, we think, invested about \$50 billion in Afghanistan. That's a lot, a lot of money. Largely, that is for security infrastructure. Largely, it's for the accountability of the Afghan Defense Forces and the Afghan National Police. It has very important functions for the government. But on the other hand, what hasn't been able to happen is economic development, creation of jobs, building of more schools and hospitals, and the expansion of people's ability to support themselves. Because largely US assistance—even the assistance that has been slighted for economic development—has gone into large infrastructure projects. There are about 300 NGOs that are working—nongovernmental organizations—that are working in Afghanistan. And of those, only a small handful of them, are doing what we consider traditional humanitarian work. And that's the kind of work that Refugees International looks at. We look at whose giving assistance to the neediest in the community just because they are needy. Not because they belong to this political party. Not because they came from this particular place. Because they have a genuine need. Who is dealing with the entire range of groups and interests in the entire community, in order to create the humanitarian space that makes it possible for you to provide assistance. Whether you support the Taliban, or you support some other group, or you support the government, or you wish to be independent and wish nothing to do with any of the above. Many of the NGOs are accepting funding to do large scale projects. Some used arms contractors, but only about 10%. There is a big debate now on whether Afghanistan will permit the continuation of private security forces working in the country. Some of you may have seen Dick Holbrooke's story when he was interviewed about this before he unfortunately died. He said he was in a car one day, the US Representatives, a special envoy from Afghanistan to Pakistan, and the driver and the armed security guard in the front were making him really nervous and how aggressively they were moving throughout the country. He asked them to stop. And the driver and the armed security guard told him to shut up. He had nothing to say to them. They did not work for him. If you knew Dick Holbrooke, he did not take that lying down. He came back and fought a campaign that people who work for the US Government should respond to the US Government, and should take into account that country or the customs in the place in which they are living and working.

So Refugees International is particularly sympathetic with the desire of the Afghan Government not to have 175 security contractors running around the country armed, fully armed and heavily equipped at a time when we are engaged in building a civil society and engaged in restoring the rule of law. On the other hand, there is an active conflict going on. The ISAF, the International Security Assistance Forces that went into Afghanistan in 2001 are now working very hard in the South and East to try to regain control in the areas of the country where the Taliban or armed opposition groups—OAGs [Other Armed Groups] are what they call them in Afghanistan—have taken hold or are threatening local populations. As a result of that conflict there is displacement. Last year when we were in Afghanistan, they estimated that displacement was about 150,000 to 200,000. Nobody was exactly sure because some areas of the country you are not able to access as a foreigner. And it is even difficult for Afghans to access those areas when there is conflict going on. This year there is an additional 115,000 people displaced as a result of conflict, some from natural disasters. We spoke with the head of the Afghan Red Cross Society, who is a woman, who has told us what has become so difficult in Afghanistan is the years of war, the very tough economy, conditions under which people are living. Which Afghans who are traditionally very hospitable to anybody, now she says the margins for sustaining their own lives are extremely limited—so their ability to provide long-term hospitality, or to host refugees or internally displaced persons, is very limited, and that has us worried. When we go to a

community that has been struck by conflict, where there has been fighting, in some cases violence, and when we go into that community we are finding people scattered around at the edges of the village distance. She said that would not have happened in Afghanistan before. But given the very small margin of survival that many families live on it makes it very difficult for them to accept long-term sustaining hospitality or assistance even to other community members. Additionally, when the fighting occurs we hear from the International Committee of the Red Cross or UNHCR, and also from Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees, and the displaced people who have been subjects of attacks when the Taliban comes in and tries to assert control over villages have resisted. They do not want to be taxed. They do not want to give up their sons to the Jihad. They do not want to take their girls out of school. So they leave, they leave the area. They are willing to go long distances to get away, or just go to the outskirts and hope the fighting will be over in a week or two and they can go home. They will go long distances. Outside the city Mazar-i-Sharif where we met hundreds of families, who have fled already in the north, some of whom blame the pressure of the ISAF forces in the South and the East by pushing the armed elements to other parts of the country that were formerly quiet and peaceful. We talked to them a little about what was going on in the country and what their views were. They were very concerned that the Taliban will be gaining control of the country. They were very concerned about their future. Some of them told us, one elderly gentleman said, "I lived under them a month before and I will not live under them again. I hope we can defeat them. I hope we can defeat them." But others will ask you what should they do with their children? Where should you say send them abroad to go to school? Where could they get jobs in other countries? They weren't sure of the future of their country. Many were concerned that the US and the ISAF forces were going to pull out in 2011. We talked to them about the London Conference, and there was an attempt now that they were saying 2014. People were not sure. There were also widespread sections when we talked to groups that ISAF forces were no better than the Taliban that they committed as many atrocities. The night bombings, the night raids, were equally bad. But when you talk to the human rights advocates in Afghanistan and also to the UN people on human rights abuses, they would point out very strongly that obviously these forces are not equal. The most serious, the most damaging, and the worst kind of atrocities were being committed by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups, and not by the outside forces, and not by the Afghan security forces. But still the perceptions are there. The Open Society Institute did a very interesting study that summer urging the governments that are working in ISAF to take into account the fact that public perception means something, even if they aren't real. It means you have to work on educating. It means that you're trying to help people understand about the government, about these military operations and what they are trying to do.

The thing that is remarkable about Afghanistan is the fact that the currency has maintained its value with very, very small fluctuations. With those of you who have worked in other crisis areas or dealt with other situations, know that often when a country has problems, particularly an armed conflict, going on its currency is greatly affected, while Afghanistan's currency maintains about 50 afghanis to the dollar—and that is marvelously consistent wherever you go in the country. As Afghanistan in the old days, it was always amazing to be out in the countryside seeing a sign saying foreign exchange in five languages, showing the exact rate of the afghani to the euro to the dollar and to any other country you can think of, the riyal, et cetera because Afghanistan has always had that type of sensitivity to culture and trade.

So what can we hope for? We have talked a lot to the United Nations, the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has a presence in Afghanistan. We talked about the things we are greatly concerned about: the inability to get access to communities where humanitarian aid is needed due to natural disasters or as a result of conflict and fighting. We talked about the need for more partnerships from international NGOs, and the UN, and local Afghan organizations. These are the same organizations that were delivering aid under the Taliban—and in some cases during the Russian occupation of the country. We talked about the need to attract more investment and disaster risk management in Afghanistan. In Mazar in particular, the UN has done a very good job of working with the National Disaster Management Agency in that country to build local skills with some small NGO projects, to teach people how to measure the river water to know how quickly the flood is coming, to have sandbags ready and shovels, to have marked evacuation routes from areas that are subject to sudden flooding in every spring or every fall, depending on the season. We talked about the concern that the water table in Afghanistan is low and that this year there has not been much rain or much snow. So there is concern for this year that there could be a failed harvest in Afghanistan—which could mean greater hardship, particularly for the poor. The Afghan diet particularly for poor families is largely bread—and so the bread price is extremely important. You can see when you travel around the country and get some sense of the local economy frankly by the price of the bread. But there is going to be a substantial need for food assistance as we continue in Afghanistan. The UN has appealed for \$675 million—that is a lot of money. But they also have an enormous amount of need in Afghanistan, particularly in disaster risk management, providing food assistance, in supplementing the small national health programs that have been set up, in dealing with the needs of returning refugees, these really large families. Another population that the UN is very concerned about in Afghanistan is the standing deportees from Iran. Many Afghans go to Iran hoping to work. Why is that? Well, Iran has 77 million people, it has a life expectancy of 69.7 years, its per capita income is \$11,200—so more than 10 times, and it is a developed society. So many Afghans go there illegally hoping to work and they are caught and expelled, and they come back usually with nothing. Sometimes families are separated because they found the man at work or they found the wife in the community—the wife and children were deported and they come back with literally nothing. These national organizations for migration sometimes are able to do a little bit, like money for buses to get back to the country. What is also depressing is that the UN—to do a better job with the return and reintegration of refugees coming back to the country—the UN at the point, the UNHCR provides the per capita grants of about \$100 for families, per person, depending on how far they are going in the country. We found out that the truck ride costs \$125 per person. So how would they pay for that? When they got back, what did they have? Nothing, nothing. The UN has enough funding to maybe give them six blankets, two jerry cans, and two plastic tarps, and that's about it. That's not much to get started. So UNHCR started to improve its shelter program this year and it is looking to assist 4,600 families. A family in Afghanistan is six or seven people. So you hear if there's 900 families displaced, you know you're talking about a large number of people, 6,300 people.

So that's Afghanistan. What are we trying to do? We are trying to encourage the Congress, who are not funding anything at the moment, to say that they have to fund humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian assistance goes to people who need, and without it many people will suffer and die. And we are urging the United Nations and for the US to continue to fund the UN, its life-giving programs, and to look not much at the major infrastructure needs, but for the humanitarian

needs of the people, particularly for access to health care, for basic education, and for clean water. With that I'll stop. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much. [*Applause.*] So I am going to open the Q&A with a few questions and then I will call on anyone who has a question, I just ask you to identify yourself and keep the question brief. So just to start off with where you ended with all this humanitarian assistance going in there, how come people's needs aren't being met? I'm going to ask a few questions together. Another issue is obviously women, what is really happening? It was such a high priority starting with the Bush Administration, and is it still a high priority being on the ground? And I guess one other issue I just read about last night was that Australia is going to be considering deporting people who do not get asylum, failed asylum seekers. I understand that other countries are doing that. Also the Afghan Government has said that they cannot guarantee the safety of these people. So what happens to people coming from a variety of countries?

Ms. Calabia: Well USAF has said to have invested \$50 billion since the close of the fiscal year 2010. About \$15 billion has been pledged or more for Afghan reconstruction and development. We met with the ministries from the UK, from the EU, from ECO [Economic Cooperation Organization], from the Germans, to the Danes, and many countries who have forces as part of the ISAF operation have been honed in different parts of the country. What they tend to do is that they give aid in assistance to that part of the country, and only that part of the country. In some cases the security force country decides to assist the Afghan Government so they can build local services. In other cases, the emphasis has been more on the German model: they will fund NGOs, or local organizations, to take on certain kinds of activities. But in terms of the humanitarian need, not much money goes into the country for purely humanitarian purposes. We were one of the groups two years ago pushing for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of USAID [OFDA] to go into the country to look at the conditions, to look at the malnutrition, look at the natural disaster problems, look at the need for improved coordination between the various donors. OFDA has been out there for over two years, and last year they spend \$33 million in the country, dealing a lot with natural disaster reaction and also with emergency assistance to displaced populations, and in some cases to NGOs. Their budget this year is \$1.1 million. The needs in Afghanistan has not changed. What's changed is the privatization of the need. USAID will put in about \$44 million in food aid in Afghanistan, food aid that is really needed. Some of it is used for girls to go to school, to encourage families to send their daughters to school. Some of it goes for displaced persons. Some of it goes into nurseries and hospitals for the poor. So the needs are definitely there. The question is when the country is doing as the Germans are where \$345 million in aid in Afghanistan—they've picked out certain types of projects they want to fund. And we go back to them, we need to do some natural disaster reconstruction in the North, something about earthquake-proof houses in this part of the country. They say, well not this year, not this year. So that's a concern.

What's the situation of women? It depends on where you are in the country. Afghanistan is primarily rural, an agricultural economy. Much of the population is extremely conservative. Do women wear burqas in the street? Not as much in Mazar but if you went to Jalalabad, I'd say yes, yes they do. I was told in Kandahar I would have to buy a burqa and walk around in it. We weren't able to go to Kandahar because the place we were going to stay was attacked. The owner called us and suggested that we come another time—the third time this has happened. We have

talked to Afghan women who worked for different NGOs in the country, who worked for the government, and they were very proud of the progress they have made. They have been proud of the fact that their daughters are going to high school, and in some cases to college and university, and that they were encouraging them. They were concerned obviously that there was a conservative religious element and they did not want to lose their ability to function as a part of the society. And they said it was an uphill battle. Some families go to cities who came back from Pakistan and Iran because in the cities they feel that women can have more of a life. We met with one of the areas in where Afghanistan has set aside some land for refugees, outside Jalalabad. It is one of their best functioning communities. They set aside land for about 80,000 different households—only about 30,000 households will be able to take advantage of it. As I told you almost 6 million people came back. And even if you do the math and say everyone has six persons in a family, you'd be at a million households. Anyway, this guy was very proud, he said "I ran a school in Pakistan; I was a head master and had a very nice life." And I said, "why did she come back to Afghanistan?" He said, "Do you have any children?" I said, "I have four daughters." "That's great and what are they doing?" "Well one is going to be a doctor. One is going to be a lawyer. One is going to be a teacher. And the other one hasn't made up her mind." And I said, "you came back to Afghanistan and you're in Jalalabad?" And he said, "yes because this is my country and we are going to make it possible for our daughters to function." Now if there are more people like that in society there are opportunities. But it's not easy. And obviously as women have told us, as Afghan women have told us, and some women in other countries, wearing a burqa is some places. It makes it possible for them to move around in the market places, and so they do it. Although that does not mean they don't want their rights, and they're concerned about the functioning of the Parliament. We talked to one of the trainers of the parliamentarians, who told us that interestingly the women were concerned about the future of the country, as well as their own rights. And they talked about that a great deal because they wanted to see the country progress and for their families to have opportunities.

Deportation, there are lots of Afghan asylum seekers all over the world—some of them out 10, 15 years. They have not been found to be refugees or the government decides that the situation in Afghanistan had its own functioning. The government has its own constitution. It has law, they should be able to return to Afghanistan. The difficulty in coming back to Afghanistan is: where are they from? Who controls that part of the country at this point in time? And as Pat said, the Afghan government can't protect people. So if you left because you were a fearful opponent of the Taliban or you belonged to a political party that is no longer considered to be an acceptable one, you could be considered a tremendous risk. Afghanistan is still largely a tribal society. People's loyalties are much to their communities, their tribes, and their groups. Australia is not alone, the UK, Sweden, Canada, we'd all like to deport people to Afghanistan. And so over the protests of the government, but of course the government lets them come home. They are in a very difficult situation. Unfortunately the security in the countryside has gotten more dangerous. There were over 900 security incidents last year. More than 10 international NGO workers were killed. There have been attacks on UN personnel. In many parts of the country it is no longer safe to go by road anymore. So in our case we flew from city to city and by road to Jalalabad—where some people questioned our sanity for doing it. But there are good sources of information on security throughout the country. NGOs have set up an organization called ANSO [Afghanistan NGO Security Office], which collects security information every morning. So we get up in the morning and we call ANSO saying I'm going to go here, what has happened? And you could

also check with the US Embassy because you'll get better information than ANSO because of course civilians are not a part of the government. That's some of the challenges.

Question: Hi, I am Shikha Bhatnagar with the Atlantic Council. Thank you for coming. I have noticed that in security proposals in Washington, DC people are talking about military security in the region. If you could give me an understanding about the needs by providing more humanitarian assistance in order to complement the security goals being made by the US and the ISAF forces. In your observation, do you feel as if there is a rift? Do you feel that there is adequate communication between those who are working on humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and the military leaders?

Ms. Calabia: One of the difficulties is that we all speak different languages. The military speaks the language of force protection. Humanitarians talk about need, on the basis of need and not because you are pro or anti. We talk about basic humanitarian needs. When you talk to the military, the concern is how do you protect yourself? How do you force your will on a community? How do you accomplish your ends? And one of the controversial elements of the US operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan is the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, PRTs—which are embedded civilian-military operations. The Afghans, interestingly the Afghan people just consider it the military. When you plan to sit down to talk to in the village when you say the PRT they will just look at you and say you mean military. Even though some of those PRTs are doing very interesting kinds of stuff around—trying to help farmers improve their agricultural production, introducing kinds of seeds and tools, harvesting practices and cultivation. At the same token, there are small isolated individual kinds of things that are happening. And the military correctly is concerned about clearing the holding. One of the things they have started last year under General Petraeus is that they are going to equip local Afghan militias in villages to make sure they had an alternate local national police. The difficulty for some of the civilians that we talked to and some of the government officials was the fact that these are people that are not particularly trained. And they said one thing we don't need is more people walking around with guns, and RPGs, and other types of things, and army vehicles. We have too much of that. We talked to Afghans, what they think about the future, about education. Everybody we talked to said education is the key. Education is the key for Afghans to get along with each other, to realize that we are one country, one society, and that we have to work and figure ways to build our country and build our community. That is the answer. So the military sees this country in a very different situation. The US policy in the region is not a surprise to anybody in Washington. It is driven by the military—the military objective in the country and it is not the same as economic development activities.

Question: Thank you for your participation. My name is Max Jalandoni. My question is that I would imagine that in order for the Afghans to be self-sustaining the people would need to generate jobs. And in that regard, small and medium sized business proposals to achieve the purpose the way the operation should be. And so what sort of businesses do you think they should they try to develop and what parts of the country would be best to get them?

Ms. Calabia: It is a very good question. The UN Development Programme and the World Bank have done studies of the country. USAID has done similar studies about potential areas of development. But the military was happy to pull attention to the fact that Afghanistan sits on an

enormous amount of minerals, mineral deposits, some are extremely valuable. But the question is how do you get access to them? The Chinese are opening a big copper mine in Afghanistan. But they have to be demined first. One of the things I've failed to mention is the fact that Afghanistan is still littered with landmines and unexploded ordnance—some of them go back to the Russian occupation, starting in 1979. One of the major NGO activities in the country, local NGOs, as well as international ones, is demining. So going into a piece of property and trying to get rid of the unexploded ordnance, get rid of the anti-personnel mines, so that it is safe to till the land again to build a road, to open a factory. One of the UN officials I spoke to said it would take five years before Afghanistan—five years with the same level of intensity that we are doing this year, to remove the unexploded ordnance that we know about at this particular point in time.

As far as investment and small businesses, I think USAID, and as I said, the EU and ECO, and UNDP, have been looking at different kinds of enterprises. And obviously energy is a very important factor for the country, and access to that energy. As I said, like Mazar who has access to energy, but if you go about a mile outside the city limits there is no electricity for two hours, a day possibly. Another reason important for business is security. So if there's going to be international investment, people are going to be looking for immediate returns. Afghanistan is not a country where there are a lot of immediate returns frankly, except in opium. Opium production remains a major part of the Afghan economy. In fact, General McChrystal and General Petraeus agreed it was time to force bombers from giving up that form of income production because in some cases it was the only things keeping their families going. So there are small businesses that can drive around. There is a lot of construction going on in cities. There are a lot of IT crews going up to places with computers—lots of small businesses, restaurants. Afghanistan is an agricultural country. We were there doing pomegranate season. If you never had an Afghan pomegranate, I urge you to put it on your list. It's one of the best things I've ever had. And they are extremely proud of their pomegranates. But the question is the supply. Building the roads means that farmers can get their things to market. However, they have to go through ten checkpoints to pay-off ten times, keeping to discourage the farmer from trying to do that. So controlling access, making it safe for people to engage in commerce is really important.

Question: Kristina Olney with the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Thank you for putting on such a wonderful event. How are the 300 NGOs you mentioned in Afghanistan doing traditional humanitarian work you mentioned? And how much US assistance is going toward all of these NGOs? And also, what role is corruption playing in this lack of humanitarian work? And do you see a future for improvement with corruption if there was the inauguration of the new parliament?

Ms. Calabria: Those are all very good questions. Obviously corruption has been a very big problem in Afghanistan. It is a problem in many other countries, many developing countries. And sometimes one of the problems that we have when meeting with the local community groups is we heard about the \$50 billion that was pledged at the London Conference, or you know some other conference, and you know it was all stolen by the president. It takes years, years for that money to get into an economy. They have to approve projects. They have to set up the financing mechanism. They have to determine how it is going to be constructed. So there is a great deal of suspicion of the central government—an unwillingness to give them the benefit of the doubt since it goes wrong, it wasn't planned and operated. The NGOs that do the traditional

humanitarian assistance are such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which this year it unfortunately reported that it is becoming more difficult for them to operate in the country. Although they deal with everybody in the country and they get permission to do their kinds of work: their healthcare, their training of doctors and local providers, and their emergency assistance after natural disasters and conflict situations. But the security situation is very tough and they are not going to expand their operations any further. I think this is the first organization that I have ever met that said they would go immediately and work on the support. The NGOs that are doing humanitarian assistance actually tend to be smaller ones. They tend to have developed niches in society where they are willing to easily go out and meet with everyone in the community and try to get communities to buy into the things that they are trying to do. To make sure that the community understands, appreciates, and wants this kind of work, and that the community is involved in this work, whether it is healthcare, education, roads, sanitation kinds of work. And it is difficult. As one NGO we met with said we do that kind of work in other countries, but frankly we don't do it here because it is so much easier to go to USAID to get a \$300 million grant to work alongside a road construction project or to do a food for work program—which is what the UN is doing all over the country. So Afghans get paid six dollars a day for 50 days while they do some type of food for work: remove rubble, dig out latrines, that kind of stuff. But there are still substantial humanitarian needs that aren't being met. And as security become more prevalent—particularly in the north where people have been freer to move around—it can be very important that people understand that if you are doing this kind of work that is humanitarian, it is not to advance counterinsurgency strategy of the United States, Norway, Germany, et cetera.

Question: If it could be the US and the international community is giving money for traditional humanitarian work that it is not getting aid or is the money not being given?

Ms. Calabia: It is not the priority for operations. Afghanistan was a difficult place because you know there was nothing there when we went in, very little was functioning. And we have 6 million people coming back to a country and just accommodating their very basic needs is a big shock to the economy. So the US is giving assistance and it tends to be for the big privatized assistance. It's not looking for a need to develop because a volcano erupted or an explosion or there was a river flooding or there was local fighting therefore 40 people lost their houses. And understandably, when you're investing some people will say the surge will cost \$30 billion—I read that in some Congressional report. So when you spend that kind of money it's very tough to say well we should all be coming in and assisting the school kids who need lunches. We should also be trying to do something about the widows and orphans and that we should be working with the disabled. There's a feeling that we're doing all these big things, so somebody else should do those things. And I'm going to say that's the conversation we had in several places.

Question: Hi, I'm Aaron Tiffany from Deloitte Consulting. I just want to touch on a point. You keep on going back to the military. I used to be an officer in the Army. I was never in Afghanistan, but I was in Iraq. And I would say I don't necessarily agree that while the military definitely is focusing the security and point checking. I don't necessarily agree. Anybody at this point in the game who would argue that the major driver in any military type operation. I think that basically everybody knows that you can't win a war like this without engaging the local population and finding out what their needs are: economic, social, developmental, and other

things like that. But there is a disconnect, like you alluded to. It's not necessarily out of interest, maybe it's not speaking the same language. With that in mind, what do you think the military can do better to help develop these programs on the ground?

Ms. Calabia: I would say I don't think it's the military's job. I think it's the civilians for which the US Government should be facilitating. Congress is going to cut off what little side of the civilian part of the government we have, in terms of cutting the State Department and USAID, and funding for NGOs. I think lots of people in Afghanistan are told that COIN [counterinsurgency] strategy had made a big difference when it came into Afghanistan that they saw it. But then they said we don't like the Special Forces and drone attacks, and we don't like the bombing, we don't like this or the other thing. On the other hand, they would like to feel secure and that's difficult. So the COIN, the counterinsurgency strategy, is interesting and people think it made something of a change. But then the question is what kind of Afghan institutions are being developed? How can this be taken over? Afghans, like everyone else, want to have their country to themselves and run it themselves. So the question is how do they get there? And nobody is quite sure how they get there because, so far, there is a lot of disruption in the government. The parliament was elected. There was a big dispute whether the president would actually call the parliament into session in January. And the parliament threatened to come together by itself. So he realized that and let it go. There are still 150 people who are very upset that they did not win their elections and they are challenging the system. I think the problem is when you look at civilian institutions and I think when having that handle working together in those situations. Some of the NGO workers we met while in Afghanistan were military who got turned onto this kind of work, understandably. But it's very difficult because the functions are different. I think that it's ironic that one road we were on in Mazar there was a convoy who went down the road in one of those new mine resistant vehicles with the rotating turret and the guy was holding a gun in one hand and waving to the kids with the other. It was a very ironic kind of picture. And our guards said we are getting off the road; this is the most dangerous time of day and we should be nowhere near convoys. So we pulled off the road and waited for this convoy to go down the road.

Ms. Ellis: Can I just add one thing. We had a program with a *New York Times* reporter who did a series on FETs they're called, Female Engagement Teams. I'm not sure what you think about that, but their whole purpose was to connect particularly with women because they could talk to other women. And in the course of her coverage of this what was happening was they were also talking to the men and getting more of a sense from the community. That was part of her role to find out what the people there really wanted. And a lot of the women were saying that they wanted more health clinics, education. So that was kind of a side bar on what you're talking about. Isn't it true that the military in so many of these operations, whether it's in Afghanistan, other places, is not exactly thrilled about having to do the type of work they're having to do. But they have to do it because that's the situation we are in.

I just wanted to ask one last question to Dawn. You mention the divisions and the differences in the country. You know, the South, you hear about all the fighting there and the North supposedly a different scenario. You know we had another reporter who talked about how the North is becoming more like the South. But what difference does this make in terms of getting assistance

to different parts of the country, establishing the institutions, et cetera? Are there really two countries?

Ms. Calabia: Well it's more a Pashtun population in the South and in the East of the country than traditional. Pakistan has more of a Pashtun population across the border. The Pashtun population is generally described as more conservative, more religious, more fundamentalist. If you remember during the Afghan War and the Soviet occupation, there was a Northern Alliance, there was a Southern Alliance. What's interesting to me when going back to Afghanistan after many years is how many of the names are still exactly the same. We are still talking about the same warlords. Warlords that have been funded by various governments such as the US, and sometimes still being funded by the US because they control areas of the population, they control commerce, they were the leaders of the community. Some people say, well you know what the way to peace in Afghanistan is to split the country in half: the Pashtuns in the South and East and the rest becomes another place. Maybe that's what we should do, divide up the country that way. Divisions don't usually work in countries. In fact we had a number of people telling us this was the solution. All you had to do was get the Taliban South and East because they don't want any more land than that. They only want half the country. They want the half of the country where their cultural lands are obviously, and closest to markets. If you do that we said what movement ever stops with half of a country? Most movements want it all, no matter whose side you're playing for. You play to win. No, no, you don't understand. They really would be happy with half. Then why are they fighting the North side more. Well, we're not sure. So people, we're looking for solutions. Most Afghans that we had an opportunity to talk with didn't think that would be a lasting solution—though it does come on the table because people are tired of conflict. People would like to be able to go about their lives and be able to sustain their small businesses. There are a number of companies in Afghanistan, in Kabul, who advertise their tourism maps. At the very bottom of the tourism map it says this may require an armed escort if you go here. So things were better and unfortunately right now they seem to be a little worse on the ground side. So we are hoping that maybe the new parliament and maybe President Karzai, and people will get together and maybe rebuild in Afghanistan.

Ms. Ellis: We are going to have to end this here. But let's give Dawn a big round of applause. [*Applause.*] It was very interesting and informative. Thank you all for coming.