



Beyond the Headlines

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Insight into North Korea: A View from Behind the DMZ

Guillaume Scheurer: Good evening everybody. I hope everyone has a seat. Welcome to Switzerland, as this is Swiss soil and Swiss territory. We appreciate that you took the time to come—we know it's not easy, both to have the time and to bear the rain. We know DC fears nothing except the snow, maybe the metro, and the rain. [*Laughter.*] Thank you very much for coming.

I would like to thank the Women's Foreign Policy Group and Patricia Ellis—the president—in particular, for having organized this evening tonight. We hope it will be the first of many events that we can produce together. We have already a few ideas with Patricia. You know, this is a group of very key players in DC. We have all received several invitations for their programs, and in my section, the Political Section, this group and all the events are in the highlights. Some would say it's sort of a surprise because, among the three collaborators, we have three female diplomats. But even among my male colleagues, all the activities of the Women's Foreign Policy Group are very much in the forefront. Gender issues [are] important for Switzerland. We started very late, with gender—I have to confess that we gave the right to vote to women in 1971. [*In background: "Oh my God!"*] [*Laughter.*] And we are so transformed that we also accept these outcries. But we are also the only country in the world where only the male—all the males—gave the rights to women, to vote. So this can also explain a little bit. But since then I think we are catching up, and there are some issues that we are trying to make a little bit better. Recently we organized an event with the Woodrow Wilson Center and the Harvard Kennedy School on Capitol Hill; Patricia was there and I think, it was a very good event. We're overcoming obstacles and closing the gap for the political participation of women.

I have, of course, to brag a little bit about Switzerland, and I would like to excuse first the Ambassador, who is never on vacation, but this week he decided to take one week. To brag a little bit about Switzerland, I have to start with political representations. We represent the US interest in Iran and in Cuba since decades; some would say it's too long—and I swear we have nothing to do with the duration of this mandate—we would be very happy to give it back to Washington and to the US, but we are also very honored to have this protective power and mandate in Cuba and in Iran. And we also try sometimes to be active not directly on behalf of the US in foreign policy, but in good synchronization with the US—in Armenia and Turkey, with Russian ascension to the WTO and some opposition by Georgia. So we are a little bit punching above our weight in terms of foreign diplomacy. But of course Switzerland is better known for chocolate, for the watch, for the cheese, a little bit for the wine—hopefully, tonight—and this is of course our strength and we don't want to deny that. Economically, the middle of Switzerland is quite small, but nevertheless, a little giant. In the US, we create about 600,000 jobs; in 2010 we were the first foreign direct investor in the US. Last year we were only the second. So we really invest a lot in industrialized companies in the US. Switzerland is not only banking, but also industrialized in many functions. We share, of course, many values. The two countries are often referred to as "the sister republics." You took some inspiration from direct democracy, from federalism, when your founding fathers looked around for examples, and we inspired ourselves from your

constitution very much when we were writing our own constitution a little bit later. But I want to stop here because you didn't come here to listen about Switzerland. We might have another event about that. [*Laughter.*]

You came here to listen to Kathi Zellweger. Kathi is an icon in Switzerland; she was not only the Swiss presence but the Swiss soul and the Swiss heart in Pyongyang for five years. She left in 2011 but her presence is very much still in North Korea. Now the people at Stanford are able to benefit from it. She will explain that very nicely. One of the seeds that she left in Korea, we could have some benefit. Recently, in Geneva, it was the first time ever that participants from the North and from the South attended together an event. It was a very long course; it's a course organized by a center in Geneva—the Geneva Center for Security Policy—and they organize an almost academic-year-long course on security issues. There were two participants from the Minister of the People's Armed Forces and one participant from the Ministry of National Defense. The participation of the North was ensured for a long time by Kathi. So with this, I would like to give the floor to Patricia, and thank you again. [*Applause.*]

Patricia Ellis: Good evening everyone and welcome. Thank you all so much for joining us, particularly on this very rainy evening—but look, it stopped! It's fantastic. Tonight is one of our Beyond the Headlines programs—our favorites—last week we were discussing Egypt, and tonight it's North Korea. So we're very excited about being able to do that. This is the first program we've actually done on North Korea, so it makes us even more excited. I'd like to begin by thanking the DCM for having us at his embassy—Guillaume Scheurer—for his very warm welcome, warm hospitality, opening this beautiful residence to the Women's Foreign Policy Group, our members, friends, and guests. We also want to thank Anne-Lise Cattin Hennin—who's right back there, and is a very active participant in Women's Foreign Policy Group activities—for making this possible. She did approach me—she's come to many of our events, she likes them—and that's how it all happened. Thank you. We're so happy to be here.

I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's leadership and women's voices on the pressing international issues of the day; North Korea is certainly one of them. We're delighted to have Katharina—Kathi—Zellweger, former North Korea Country Director for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and as we heard, was there until 2011. She is now a fellow at Stanford University, at the Shorenstein Center on Korean Studies. We're so lucky to have her because so few people have really had the experience of living there, so spending five years there is really getting to know the country. So before I say a few more words about Kathi, I just wanted to recognize our Board member, Diana Negroponte, here with us tonight. We're very pleased to see so many other diplomats from other embassies, so thank you all so much for coming. So despite the heat, we have a great turnout, and it's a real tribute to our speaker and also to the interest in North Korea, which really could not be more timely. We really did not plan it this way, but just over the weekend, there was a dismissal of North Korea's top military leader, and then today's news is that Kim Jong-Un appointed himself as the Marshal, which means that he has absolute control of the military. And it was just before I came here that I, in my journalist tradition, saw that there's a lower-level general who is replacing the one who was dismissed. So we couldn't have a better guide to let us know what all these new developments mean for North Korea and also to understand the food and humanitarian situation on the ground, which we hear so much about. So we just want to thank Kathi for coming here—she's just had such an impressive career—I mean, 30 years working on all of these issues, development in China, North Korea, et cetera. I'm just going to mention a few highlights because her bio is in the program book and in the interest of time, I think that it is best. As I mentioned, she's the Pantech Fellow in Korea Studies at Stanford—and that [*Pantech*] is a South Korean tech company, which she told me about. As I said, 30 years experience in Hong Kong, China and North Korea, and then she lived and worked for 5 years in North Korea, in the capital, as the Country Director for the Swiss Development Agency. She focused her time there on sustainable agricultural production to address food security issues, income generation, and capacity development. She also worked with the business school there, where they would train mid-level managers, and in addition, for many different companies, she was

engaged in training of North Korean diplomats. So this is quite a portfolio. Please join me in welcoming Kathi Zellweger. [*Applause.*]

Katharina Zellweger: Good evening everybody. It is a great honor to be here. It's a great honor to be back at the Swiss embassy—Swiss territory—as I am Swiss. So thank you for hosting such a distinguished group. I'm very happy to speak to you all—I've met fascinating people during just the half hour we had at the reception here. I was in Pyongyang up to September last year, spending five years there, and then more or less straight to Stanford. So you can imagine the cultural shock that I had. [*Laughter.*] But I'm still smiling, and I don't need to go into details why I'm smiling. So tonight I would like to talk to you about the DPRK after Kim Jong-Il's death, the need for humanitarian aid and development cooperation, and then: is North Korea changing?

So last December, a bombshell dropped basically. The announcement of Kim Jong-Il's death by the television; I think the whole world was stunned at the many days of this incredible outpouring of grief. And immediately speculation started, with anything from collapse, to reform, to more clashes with South Korea, to reunification. And now, Kim Jong-Un is in power. My assumption is that there is some sort of a collective leadership in place, with a central figure from the family, the Party, and the military. This was already demonstrated during the many months that Kim Jong-Il was ill in 2008. And I would say that even if there are frictions within the North Korean elite, regime survival will be placed above factionalism. The present year, 2012, is a very important year for North Korea. In April they celebrated the 100th birthday of Kim Il-Sung, and then there are leadership changes also in China and in Russia, presidential elections in South Korea, and of course also an election year in the US. The leadership in Pyongyang, however, does hope that 2012 will remain on with the manner of continuity and stability. My view is that North Korea—the regime believes that for its survival, it needs to maintain its nuclear program—with, perhaps, a possible willingness to freeze or cap some elements. With a nuclear deterrent, the regime feels more secure and therefore more inclined to also gradually move on and open up—and that is with China's assistance or pressure. So a slow economic reform process has started, and I will talk about that a bit more later on. However, provocations by North Korea can never be vital without—be it because of internal dynamics or regional or international issues—but China is a major player in North Korea also on stability, and on the flow of refugees and problems in the Northeast. Overall, from my assessment, the succession is going quite well. Up to what extent Kim Jong-Un is really in charge, we will only know in one or two years. However, my colleagues based in Pyongyang—I've been in touch with them regularly—they tell me that there is a somewhat different mood right now, that it is a lighter atmosphere, that people are more relaxed, and also meetings are apparently much easier to conduct. So that, I think, is very interesting. How much we can read into it, only time will tell.

Of course food issues are always in the media and are always talked about. North Korea has been receiving humanitarian aid and some development assistance since 1995. Many lives have been saved and improvements are clearly noticeable in terms of food security, health services, water and sanitation provisions. But much more needs to be done. The present food situation remains fragile. It is, from my viewpoint, not famine, but chronic malnutrition with pockets of extreme poverty and hunger. And then the other big issue is that the balance the North Korean children have—that North Koreans in general have—is very much focused on cereals or carbohydrates with hardly any proteins, fats, or micronutrients, and therefore is not a very healthy upbringing. There are still a lot of hungry people in North Korea, that's for sure. At present the cereal rations from the public distribution system are 395 grams per person, per day—a mixture of rice and corn. Now what does that mean? How many calories is that? It's about 1,400 calories, and we consider that basically a diet. And also think of the extreme climate in winter, when it's so cold, on an empty stomach. It's tough. The United Nations World Food Programme is the main provider of food aid; the present program aims to feed about 3.5 million vulnerable people: women, children, and the elderly. However, resources is a big problem. For the present operation, they have received one-third of the funding they need. And I can tell you it's a very

tough decision—who do you give food aid, and who is off the list? It's not one that I would like to make. We have read recently about a drought. It is of concern; it will affect mainly the early crops and probably also the transplanted corn, but what is the impact on this year's harvest? We can't tell because a lot depends on the rain in the next few weeks. But whatever happens, it always affects the most vulnerable people disproportionately.

Why do I still advocate humanitarian aid, particularly food aid? I have been involved in food aid since 1995. To cover the basic needs is a prerequisite for progress, in order that people—the general population—being freed from daily worries can gradually have the time and the energy to assess their own situation and start asking questions. Right now, it's survival; they don't have time to look at their own misery and why they are in this situation. So improving people's lives continues to also opening up the society. Also I'm very aware of the fact that nowhere in the world does humanitarian aid solve basic systemic problems. I have no doubt the North Korean government could do more—could do better—but will it do so? Will the food go to the military, be sold in the markets, hoarded, or otherwise not reach people that it should reach? These are questions aid agencies have been grappling with for many years, and not just in North Korea. The issue of monitoring must be addressed and is addressed. It can be addressed. And it is now much better in place than 15 years ago, when the WFP [World Food Programme] started working in North Korea and knew next to nothing about the system. It was a learning process on both sides, and we have come a long way. Moreover, I also firmly believe that mistrust should not be the reason for withholding aid. To help North Koreans—especially North Korean children—is an investment into the future, but above all, it is a humanitarian act.

A few words to development cooperation—that was what I was doing from 2006 to 2011, when I worked for the Swiss government. Food aid can be collaborated with the World Food Programme, but we had addressed food security issues—for example, with the sloping land management project, or an involvement which was in biological pest control for maize and cabbage, two of the main harvests. We also ran a capacity development program, where we organized a lot of workshops in the country with external consultants, and per year we sent 80 to 100 North Koreans abroad for training. The young diplomats would study for three months in Geneva and then would have the opportunity to go to Brussels, to visit the Red Cross in Geneva, the UN in Geneva—a good exposure and a huge learning. Or we had short-term programs with a university in Beijing in the field of banking or finance or legal matters. We sent people to a peace mediation course for long-term studies in agro-forestry, to a center in China, or a finance conference attendances so that they would be exposed to the wider world. For me, one of the most fascinating involvements was, however, the Pyongyang business school. Four cycles were conducted, each one with 12 monthly seminars consisting of three intensive days for 30 to 35 middle managers from companies, and then we also had a few professors from the universities where they teach economics. We had a contract with the Hong Kong Management Association, so we flew in lecturers every month, and the curriculum was basically a mini-MBA. There was an enormous amount of interest in this program, and I felt last year the North Koreans really started to ask a lot of questions about the market economy—how does it function? And I think they realized that they had to learn a lot in order to comprehend a situation when they are trying to do business with the world. Feedbacks from the business school were amazing. The participants found the training useful and also very appropriate; they could use what they learned immediately, and that's important in the context of North Korea, where they are under pressure to perform. The lecturers said they couldn't have more eager students. The North Korean authorities expressed appreciation for the program and the Swiss government felt like we were making a valuable contribution.

When you do capacity development, you work with individual organizations' and societies' strengths and human and organizational capacities so that they basically can manage their own affairs better. And it's putting people at the center of development and finding ways how to influence people's mindsets. And that is the key, and that was amazing to see—the changes that were taking place. Which brings me to the next topic: is North Korea changing? I have been asked this question many,

many times. And, yes. And I call the changes “the 5 M’s:” Markets and Money are playing a much bigger role in the daily lives of ordinary North Koreans. Mobile phones have become a common form of communication. Motor cars have increased, and in Pyongyang there are signs that a Middle class is developing. And this is fascinating to see, and because I lived there for five years and I’ve been going in and out for ten years between 1999 and 2006, North Korea of 1995 is not the same as the North Korea of 2011. China’s influence in North Korea is strongly affected; most investments are in Chinese companies, in mining, and also all the goods in the markets are—about 75% of goods in the markets—are from China, or also preferential food imports and petrol—gasoline—the Chinese own the petrol stations in North Korea. Right now, two special economic zones on two small islands are being established right next to the Chinese border in Dandong—an interesting development. Of course, doing business with North Korea is extremely complex, and moreover, many Western businesspeople shy away from a country with strong UN sanctions and US sanctions, which leads me to the conclusion that we have basically also pushed North Korea into the arms of China, because there is no other alternative for them.

A few words to the markets, because that’s again something which has changed. Farmers’ markets have existed for a long time, and they take place every ten days in the countryside—selling, buying, bartering. But by now, all the big cities and towns have established proper daily markets; the biggest one is in Tongil, where farmers are allowed to go. You pay in North Korean won, but there are also hard currency shops and restaurants where you pay in euro and US dollars and RMB’s [Chinese currency]. Prices are amazing—quite expensive—but then you also need to know the official exchange rate is 1 euro is 137 won—the unofficial is 1 euro to 4,200 won.

Salaries of North Koreans are extremely difficult to assess. It is cash payment in North Korean won plus the cereals from the public distribution centers, subsidized goods from the state shops, income grants like vegetable oil and coupons for meals in restaurants. So I was never able to say, “How much does a North Korean earn?” because it’s virtually impossible. Where is the money coming from, you ask? How can they shop? Why can’t a middle class develop? It’s trading with China, some smuggling and corruption, then we have North Koreans who were born in Russia, Malaysia, and China, and the Middle East, and they all can send little pittances back home. Then we have remittances from the defectors in South Korea through many channels, but they get to their families back in North Korea. And then in Pyongyang basically every family tries to have one member who works for an international organization, an embassy, a joint venture, or a trading house. And then many North Korean units—also they are technically still state-owned—are heavily involved in what I would say amounts to private business. Why is the regime allowing such activities? I think they are worried about further public anger. They pushed back to the failed currency reform in December 2009—it was so strong that it made a reversal, and now the regime was fearful of antagonizing the politically important population of Pyongyang again. Therefore, allowing certain economic activities that do not pose a direct threat—political threat. And a little bit of a shift in strategy and focus on improving the economy. “Strong and prosperous” is the slogan that North Koreans are using; that means for North Korea: we are strong, we have nuclear weapons, now we can focus on the economy. Greater emphasis is placed on international economic engagements, especially China and Russia, and also some Southeast Asian countries.

So, in closing, based on my experience in working with and in North Korea, I believe that I saw [*Inaudible.*] as a way to force change. Forced change does not work. People-to-people contacts are extremely important. Transformation can be stimulated by supporting first the basic needs, but also the education, by providing information and access to information, and also through market activities, trade, and commerce. South Korea today has about 50 million people and is the 25th biggest country in the world in terms of population. North Korea has 24 million people, ranked #48. A united Korea would, right after Germany, become the 17th biggest country in the world. Think of the strong democratic power in Asia—wouldn’t that be something? So if we favor a peaceful solution, we need to build riches, not wars. This is, however, hard work, filled with successes, failures, and disappointments; it needs a lot of

patience. Ultimately the people on both sides of the Korean peninsula will have to make it work. But we, as the international community, can support the process and engage. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Ms. Ellis: Well that was absolutely fantastic, and I know that we all learned a lot. What I was just saying is, thank you so much Kathi. It was really wonderful. Let's give her another round of applause. *[Applause.]* I know that we all learned so much because North Korea has been such a mystery to so many people, and this was really amazing. I'm going to open it up to some questions and then we're going to go to the audience. We're going to try to get to as many questions as possible, so please be patient. I want to start with the news of the day and what you said about the possible changing mood. Could you elaborate a little more about what your colleagues on the ground have been saying? And do you think it has anything to do with the fact that the new leader studied in the West, studied in Switzerland, that he's young? I mean, what and why do you think it will take two years to know what's really happening there?

Ms. Zellweger: Good question. Of course, the changing mood—I can only say what my colleagues tell me, as unfortunately I haven't been back to Pyongyang. I will be going back in October, exactly a year after I left. So it will be interesting to see what has changed. But let me just say that it's no longer so gray, so monotonous. People are more open, curious. What I thought was interesting was that one of my colleagues said that meetings are easier to conduct, which probably means that you don't get a "no, no" all the time—that is what I would think. But I can't say much more to that. Of course I think it has to do with the change in leadership. When I was there, Kim Jong-Un was groomed as the future leader already, and the younger staff in my office, I mean, they felt that was great—a young leader coming out. They couldn't say much; they did not know much about the family. They would often say, "Oh, you know much more than we do," and of course I made sure that they would get all the information possible, from magazines and all that. But will it have an impact, that he has studied in the West? Let's hope so. And that's why I'm saying that it will take time to see the impact of changes.

Ms. Ellis: Because you saw firsthand the impact of having training and bringing some of these North Koreans to different places, to Europe and to Beijing and all that.

Ms. Zellweger: Right, but, you know, this will be changes at the higher level, and that I think just takes time. You will never know. With North Korea, you will never know what could be announced tomorrow.

Ms. Ellis: But how much pressure do you feel is on the new leader to follow the traditions of his father and grandfather?

Ms. Zellweger: Actually I think it's much more the grandfather than the father, and I would think that it gives him some security to follow in his footsteps, at least in the beginning. And then I think once he has established relationships with the military and with the Party—the two most important bodies—I think then you may see changes.

Ms. Ellis: And this will only be—I mean, you follow it closely, but—how would you characterize the relationships between the North and the South at this time?

Ms. Zellweger: I think they've reached probably the lowest level in many years. I was just in South Korea a couple weeks ago, in June, and I felt in South Korea was also, we need to do something—we can't go on the way it has been going on for the last couple of years. So I think there is a bit of waiting for the elections, and after the elections a new strategy to engage in.

Ms. Ellis: And lastly, I picked up from your talk that sanctions—you don't think that sanctions are effective in bringing change, and the kind of change that one would want to see in North Korea. Could you clarify your position on that?

Ms. Zellweger: Well, what I have seen is basically just one example. The businesses I knew who did business the way it is conducted in the rest of the world—they were basically pushed into the gray zone because no one wanted to bank with them anymore. Or even the problems we, as a Swiss government office, had to import a car. I mean, it took me half a year to get a car into the country. And then still, probably the very top, which isn't visible in Pyongyang—you never see the very top—they probably still get what they get. But it's everybody lower down who has much more difficulties, and I just don't think that it's helping much.

Ms. Ellis: Okay, well let's open it up and, if you don't mind, I'm going to take a few questions together. I'm going to ask that you stand, please, and give your name and keep your questions brief. One question each, please. Okay, over here please.

Question: You spoke about the food distribution. How is that done? And also, it sounds like even upper-level people get food distribution. So how does food distribution happen?

Ms. Ellis: Can you tell us who you are, please?

Question: My name is Bonnie Becker.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. Okay, yes, Ruth?

Question: I'm Ruth McInerney, and I was in North Korea in 2001. My husband at the time was President of the Pacific Asia Travel Association, and his job when he went over there—with another colleague—was to investigate travel and tourism in North Korea. I was just wondering if that went anywhere. I know you mentioned that some people have gone to Europe and to other parts of Asia, but how about tourism into North Korea itself, and if so, who would be the ones to go?

Question: Natalie Liu with Voice of America. I'm here to ask a question on my own behalf, not on behalf of the agency. I'm just curious whether you personally were in Pyongyang when the New York Philharmonic, led by Lorin Maazel, came to visit? When you were in Pyongyang, did you attend the concert? And if you didn't personally, do you know anyone who was there? What was it like? I thought the pictures from the concert that I saw were [*Inaudible.*] and I just want to know how it was received there.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. Okay, let's start with those.

Ms. Zellweger: Good. Okay, food distribution basically, when I speak of public distribution system, that is the government system where rations are allocated to everybody in principle, but with the food shortage it is no longer functioning 100%. So it's up and down and sporadic. Then the food aid goes through a totally different channel. Food aid is programmed for target groups and then there is a geographic targeting, and monitoring afterwards. So let's say every village or town has public distribution centers and then the residents are assigned to a public distribution center, and then they are warned that the day after tomorrow there is an allocation, and they have ration books, and they come with bags and go to the distribution center, sign up for what they get, and take the food home. Does that answer? Okay.

Tourism to North Korea is basically a recent development—I think it's a very good development because the more people that can go to North Korea, I think the better gradually the understanding is—what is North Korea all about. Plus, it also brings money into the country, which goes to the lower level: your tour guide, your bus operator, you know, a little tip here, a little tip there. But it gets things moving, so I'm very happy that more visas are granted and there is also one American tour agency based in

Chicago that does regular tours for Americans to North Korea, and I can only support that. Actually in October I'm accompanying a Swiss tour group, but it's a very special one—we have in the tour group also about seven or eight active parliamentarians and I have been asked to give them a briefing every day. But it brings me back.

The New York Phil—unfortunately I was not in town, but this was the big thing. It was on North Korean television and I think everybody watched it. Everybody watched it. And I also watched it later on on television, actually. And also my North Korean staff—they all talked about it, and of course for them it was very interesting to recognize people in the audience who could go and who couldn't go, because many more people would have loved to go. I really wish for more cultural exchanges and sports exchanges because they just bring a more normal situation into the country.

Question: Hello, I'm Linda Yarr. Thank you so much for this talk. I'm with the Partnership for International Strategies in Asia. I'm curious about your work in terms of agricultural and technical assistance and also one of the sources for self-sufficiency—perhaps not yet—but in terms of fisheries and other of that means of agricultural and fish production.

Question: Hi, good evening, my name is Rahel Vyas. Education is a catalyst for developing a middle class in most emerging economies, so what is the education structure in North Korea? And can you talk about the participation of women in higher education?

Question: Thank you so much for holding the talk. I was wondering if you could tell us more about the training of the diplomats? [*Inaudible.*] And I'm wondering, what do you train them in? What kind of students are they? What kind of changes do you see in them?

Ms. Zellweger: In terms of agriculture—arable land is quite scarce in North Korea. It's only about 80%. It's extremely hilly—mountainous, I would say. And the other big issue is that the agricultural season is very short. And then extreme winters. So, from my viewpoint, probably it would be more cost-effective to develop the industries—earn money and import food—than trying to produce food and become self-sufficient. But yes, SDC—we had a program in biological pest control, as I mentioned, for maize and cabbage, with scientists from Switzerland and also from China, who would come regularly, a lot of training. But there we have now reached the level that biological pest control for cabbage and maize has been integrated into the curriculum at agricultural universities and colleges. So that's a big step forward. The other one is a sloping land management project, where we train what we call user groups how to farm on the very steep land, because during the famine years and even now, when people are hungry, they find ways to help themselves, so cutting trees and then planting whatever is their solution, but of course it's a very risky solution, because soil erosion—but also, the soil is very thin, so after three years there is no more—much harvest or yield there. And then they move to the next plot. But it can be farmed in a way that it is sustainable. And that's one of our programs: you do, about every 10 meters, a contour belt with plants that have very deep roots, so that the soil does not come down during the heavy rains, and then we introduced a lot of different species they could plant. And I remember last time I was there before it was usually maize—plant rice, which they planted—and the last time the user groups told me they had now 15 different species they were planting from trees on top to strawberries at the bottom. And the beauty of that project is that it is not land belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture. It's belonging to the Ministry of Land and Environmental Protection, and therefore there is a different approach, and the people who farm are not farmers, they are usually housewives who don't have a job, but need more food for their families. And the beauty of the project is that the proceeds, whatever they harvest, they can keep. They can keep it for their own families or they can sell it and barter it in the market, so that's a big incentive. And that's one of my big learning—whenever you do projects, try to find ways for incentives, because that works anywhere in the world, and the North Koreans are no different.

The educational structure of course, like any socialist country, very much in place, you know, very organized, and also the schools are old and dilapidated. The schoolbooks are miserable: torn, shared among children. Parents are very eager to send their children to school, and I have never, ever met a North Korean who cannot read and write. And that makes me optimistic that when things change, it will take off. Another example is the mobile telephones: in Africa, we have to give training programs of how to use a mobile telephone because people are illiterate. In North Korea, you give them a mobile telephone and off they go, you know, you don't need to train them. So that's, for me, a big plus. Higher education for women—not in high numbers. But there are a few very powerful women, but it's not the same number as men who go to universities.

The training of diplomats—well, it was in overall diplomacy, international relations, then a lot of exposure to different organizations so that they would see how the International Red Cross functions, the different UN departments, and it was done with an institute in Geneva, CASIN [The Center for Applied Studies in International Negotiations] which right now doesn't exist anymore, but the changes—we noted—it was a Swiss—you walk into the Foreign Ministry and a young diplomat, after 10 minutes he will say: "I was in Switzerland." [Laughter.] You know, and you have 10 plus points before you start negotiating, and I think this is something which, you know, could be done with other countries too.

Question: So you mentioned that change is possible in North Korea, and my question is just a question on behalf of the EU, if you could share your thoughts about it. What type of change do you envision—can you imagine something like what's going on right now in Burma/Myanmar? Based on your knowledge of the society, might it start from the elite, or is the society by itself prepared to—for such a change? How—what are your thoughts about it? You mentioned also that Chinese influence is quite strong. Do you think that it might have an effect in terms of exchange?

Question: I'm Diana Dougan, Center for Strategic and International Studies. You and I chatted a little earlier about how most people don't appreciate that Korea's one of the most homogenized countries—the whole peninsula—on earth, with its 3,500 year culture, I might add. One of the early phonetic alphabets, so it's not surprising about the literacy rate. Time is not on our side in terms of the differences between North and South Korea. Generations have died. But, two questions. One, to what degree do you feel that the people in the North consider themselves, as the South Koreans do, as Koreans first, and North Korean whatever's second? And the degree to which you still think—at least a sense of religion is still alive. As you know also, Korea's one of the most Christian countries on earth, or in Asia. But the North was even more Christian than the South before the division after World War II. So those two elements would say a lot, for your perspective.

Question: Thank you. My name is Genie Nguyen, I'm with Voices of Vietnamese Americans. Would you give us your assessment about the general knowledge of the public—the general public, and what is the level of general information, and how is the information system work in that country? What kind of media do they receive, how well connected are they with the outside world? How do they perceive themselves, and how do they perceive the outside world? See, you view the funeral of Kim Jong-Il, when they were weeping terribly. So did they really feel bad about his death? How did they feel about the government? And also another question is how do they feel about their nuclear power?

Ms. Zellweger: Well, a full basket, I would say. [Laughter.] I try my best—I don't know if I picked them all up. Well, as I said, I do believe change is possible. It's happening. I think it's going to happen more on the economic front, and the political side will come much later. I don't think we can compare North Korea with Burma because what is so special on the Korean peninsula is that we have South Korea, and that makes—gives a whole different dynamic. So I would not compare North Korea with Burma.

The impact of China. Yes, because who else do they have with those strong sanctions than China to lean onto? And China—as I said, they want stability. They don't want economic migrants flooding into

China so they are, I think, pushing quite hard that North Korea follows their model, and basically Kim Jong-Il's message after the many trips he did to China was always 'follow the Chinese model—the Chinese will do more business in North Korea—trade with them—then learn from that.'

What do the North Koreans feel in terms of nationality? Very strongly Koreans. But also very proud to be North Koreans. And, you know 60 years of division—we need to see, it's the young generation doesn't know anything else than being North Korean. That also brings me to the point that they are quite proud to be a nuclear power. And that means strength to them, and security. Religion in North Korea—it's a very difficult question. I would say there is some, but very limited under all the constraints, but, like in South Korea—I think if the North was given more freedom, probably, religion would make a strong comeback.

Information. General information. I think what's happening more and more is word of mouth, with the mobile telephone, information is being passed on. And then radio and television. And every Sunday evening, they have about 40 minutes of international news, which is cut together from all sorts of news. And that is watched by everybody—I mean everybody. And you have some very funny situations. One year, a friend of mine who is a very famous hairdresser in Hong Kong came to visit me because he thought I was crazy and had to see what I was doing. [Laughter.] But he said: "I'll come with my scissors." So he came and we established—and his name is Kim, Kimberly—Australian—so we established Kim's beauty salon, and he cut the hair of the ex-pat women who wanted to have haircuts. And then my North Korean team, the girls. The girls came with computer printouts, fashion magazine papers, hairdressing magazines—heaven knows where they got them from. And my cook—and then they all said: "this is what I want to look like," and Kim would say: "mm, bit difficult, but I can try, I can—yeah, it will not last forever, but I can do that." My cook, however, had nothing, no paper, nothing, so I said: "so Ms. Kim, what would you like to look like?" And she said: "me look like German president." [Laughter.] And you know why? Angela Merkel had been on television the evening before. And I thought that was just so funny.

Ms. Ellis: That's amazing. Okay, we have time for one or two more questions and then we have to wrap up here. Okay, one, two, three. Gentleman in the back—yes.

Question: I'm Anna Gubler. So I want to ask how strong are civil society groups, or organizations and are NGOs allowed to go into the country, and help them in a way? Thank you.

Question: Hi, Linda Softli. Will they be allowed to watch the Olympics in its entirety or just portions of it?

Ms. Ellis: And can I just throw in—what about the internet there? I mean, what exists and how controlled is it? Okay, yes. Okay, we'll take the last two.

Question: My name's Joseph Mariampillai from Relief International. You mentioned about a gentleman from [Inaudible.] I just wanted to ask you a question briefly, shortly. Could you elaborate what extent you have been able to use this, and also you mentioned before that regime, survival based on [Inaudible.] To what extent do the domestic survivors [Inaudible.] and this is the last one: you see Switzerland associated, very often in the media, [Inaudible.]

Ms. Ellis: And the last question, here.

Question: Hi, my name is Stephanie Williams and I'm a student at American University. I was just wondering if you did a lot of food aid, what sort of corruption you saw in the aid program, because I know that's a big problem, it only reaching the very top levels and not actually making it down to the

people who actually need it. And also, I'm not sure if you had any experience with the North Korean prisons or did you [*Inaudible*].

Ms. Zellweger: Wow. Now, civil society groups, of course, are hardly existing. Now I started working in China in the early 80s, and there were also no civil society groups existing in China. It's really a process, and what is now happening in North Korea—we have what I would consider semi-governmental organizations. For example, for the aged or for the disabled—and I think a couple more—and we can only hope that they gradually develop into something more, and therefore it's important that we support them. And that's where NGOs come in. It's not easy to become a resident NGO. That is pretty complex. Because—well, there was a time when resident NGOs were asked to leave, and then there was a modest upturn they found, and they are still there, working mostly under the umbrella of the European Union, because that's also where the funding comes from. But non-resident NGOs can certainly work in North Korea. It's not easy—it needs patience—but it is possible.

Olympics—yes, there is a team going to London. Unfortunately, because the relationship, North-South is so bad, it's—they are walking in separately, not like a couple of years ago, where they walked in as one team. What is however very interesting, is that there is also a team going to the Paralympics, which I'm very happy about that. This is a step forward because I personally worked a lot with the organization in North Korea who supports the disabled people. And therefore I know what it means for them to have the opportunity to go to London.

Internet access: still very limited. Very, very limited. But again, it's creeping in. I have no numbers—I heard a number of about 4,000 people, but I don't know how credible that is. Then I think—you ask about the humanitarian space. We had worked there. A lot is based on building up trust—building up relationships. And that does not happen overnight in a country who has been isolated for so long, and who is still being isolated, so you really need to work long and hard to get the human space. But once you have trust, more and more is possible. Of course, you never travel on your own—you always have somebody accompanying you. But, you know when people say, you know, “my minder,” in front of that person, who speaks perfect English, it really doesn't help to build up a relationship. But if you treat him as a colleague with whom you happen to work, he may tell you a lot of things, because you may sit for two weeks in a car traveling from A to B and you have established a relationship with him, so a lot has to do with how you yourself handle that situation. China and North Korea—no, Switzerland and North Korea—well, we have had diplomatic relations for 37 years, I think, by now. Switzerland has diplomatic relations with all countries. We are always open to offer our good services when there are possibilities and therefore North Korea is no exception. And then—unification. I'm reading a very interesting book right now. It's by Minister Lim Dong-won, whose party—well, very much behind the Sunshine Policy. It's fascinating to read it, and he asked—when Kim Dae-jung I think was visiting—they talked about unification with Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Dae-jung said it will take 10-20 years. Kim Jong-Il said: “well, I think rather 40 years. So I thought that was a very interesting remark. But personally I also hope it is a slow process, because two societies have developed into such different directions that it will take a long time for the North and the South to really be one country again. Prison—I cannot say anything about it. You know, the big problem is that with all these issues—human rights issues—we cannot verify much. And therefore I don't say—make statements—because I've learned my lessons—only what I have seen with my own eyes I'm willing to talk about. But I also must say—and we had a lunch, a very interesting conversation—but I feel a bit sad right now, what is happening, because I feel right now, from ordinary people I speak to here in the US, the feeling is the whole of North Korea is one prison camp, and that is not the case. We have 24 million people who are just ordinary people who want to get by, who want to have led their life, and who have dreams and hopes like you and I have, and I still think there is a lot of space for all of us for us to work with mainstream people. Corruption. I mean, I had bigger problems in terms of corruption when I was in China than working in North Korea. Again, it's probably bigger among Koreans themselves than between foreigners and Koreans, so I would not say that it was an issue for us.

In closing, I would like to add one last comment. If some of you go to New York, right now there is an exhibition at the Korea Society in New York. There, we are showing 25 of the posters I collected during the years I was in Pyongyang. And they are all in the agricultural field, and there's a series of food security workshops ongoing. We are planning to enlarge the exhibition because I have many more posters, but they are in Switzerland so I will send them over to New York. And we are hoping—the Korea Society is hoping to do a traveling exhibition, and I'm hoping maybe somebody in Washington will also be interested, so sorry if I do a bit of PR. [*Laughter.*] But let me also say just one experience I had with—I was interviewed on this exhibition and there is—quite often there is the feeling that there is no art in North Korea, only propaganda. And even the posters we are exhibiting right now—some are quite different from usual propaganda. And I have some very beautiful oil paintings in Switzerland, and the journalist who interviewed me—I then sent her a picture of my—of the most beautiful picture I have, and I think it changed her mind a little. And I think that is important—that we try to just bring back the message that there are a lot of things happening which are very ordinary, like any country in the world. So, thank you. [*Applause.*]

Ms. Ellis: Thank you, Kathi. [*Applause.*] We have been so lucky tonight to have Kathi here and to learn so much from you, and hear all your stories. And I think it gives people hope to hear about all the different things that are indeed going on that we never hear about. So thank you so much for coming and thank you so much for having us here in Switzerland. We enjoyed it very much. It was a wonderful evening, a wonderful reception and certainly a wonderful conversation, so thank you so much again. [*Applause.*]