



Beyond the Headlines
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Mahnaz Afkhami
Women's Learning Partnership

Highlights of the 2014 Meeting on Commission on the Status of Women

Patricia Ellis: Good afternoon everyone and welcome. Thank you all so much for coming. We are really pleased that you could join us today. I am Patricia Ellis, president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, which promotes women's leadership and voices on pressing international issues of the day such as our topic today, "Highlights of the 2014 Meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women," which focused on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, with Mahnaz Afkhami founder and president of the Women's Learning Partnership and a leading advocate for women's rights. Mahnaz is an old friend and WFPG member in the early days. She is just back from NY from the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings where she also put on side events.

Before I introduce Mahnaz, I want to begin by recognizing two WFPG Board members who are here with us: Theresa Loar, and Diana Negroponte. I also want to extend a warm welcome to two of the women ambassadors who have joined us today, Ambassador Al Mughairy of Oman and Mabel Gómez-Oliver of Mexico, to Ann Norris, senior advisor in the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues and the other women diplomats here with us today.

I also want to recognize our Corporate Advisory Council member CH2M HILL, our Organizational members, Creative Associates, IREX and Jhpiego, and our new Leadership Council member, Cynthia Anthony. I also want to introduce Sharon Kotok, who was a public member of the delegation of the United States to the Commission on the Status of Women. So thank you for joining us.

I also want to mention that we will be holding our annual celebration of women diplomats this spring and the details will follow soon. I hope that you can all join us as this is always an exciting event. It is now my pleasure to introduce today's speaker and give you some highlights of her very impressive career. As I mentioned, Mahnaz Afkhami has been a leading advocate for women's issues for decades for women's rights, and as I mentioned she founded and is president of Women's Learning Partnership, an NGO that empowers women in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia by developing and using culturally appropriate curricula to train women for decision-making roles in politics, business and NGOs. She is also executive director of the Foundation for Iranian Studies, and served as secretary general of the Women's Organization of Iran from 1970-1979, and as Iran's minister of Women's Affairs from 1975-1978. She is an accomplished author on women's leadership, political participation, human rights, and combating violence against women, a TV and radio commentator, and serves on several boards. After Mahnaz speaks I will open it up with some questions and then go to the audience. Please join me in welcoming Mahnaz Afkhami. [*Applause.*]

Mahnaz Afkhami: Thank you so much, Pat, for this kind introduction. Sometimes when you've been around for a long time, you sort of speak in decades and I'm glad that Pat spoke in years. [*Laughter.*] But, it's lovely to be here. We started the two organizations almost at the same time. It's wonderful and gratifying to keep getting these great events that are set up here and the dialogue that ensues which is so strengthening for everybody. Now I don't want to take too much time. I'd like to have more of a dialogue, especially with so many people who are so familiar with the issue. As you all know, CSW is

the policy arm on women of the United Nations, and it's been around for a very very long time—since the very beginning. But it started, I think, basically sort of having observed it along the years that it got a new vigor after the Beijing Conference. After that when we had the opportunity—of course you know the Cairo Conference was part of it—after those two magnificent conferences and the documents that came out of them, there was this great need and wish on the part of the international community to make sure that the platform would actually be implemented, brought to the consciousness of member states, as well as the civil society. And so the Commission focused on making sure that the Beijing Platform would be followed up, monitored, and given advocacy and pressure as necessary after we had finally gotten all of these nations to agree on such an advanced and progressive document.

As you all know, the Commission has 45 members who are elected every two years and that are geographically distributed. They basically follow the general aim. In this year—the 58th session—the thematic focus was on evaluation and looking at the Millennium Goals now that they're coming to an end next year in 2015, which also coincides with the 20th anniversary of Beijing, and to bring together some of the ideas that had been going around within governments, and also the private sector and NGO community. So it was a year of a lot of excitement, a lot of expectation, and a lot of energetic involvement. Some of our colleagues from the government delegations may have more to say. I was there, of course, representing an international NGO in consultative status with the United Nations, but we were not in their regular nitty-gritty closed door negotiation sessions that went on. With the NGOs we generally—on both sides—whine and scream and “No, that's not enough” and “What are you talking about” and so forth. And then we have the governments who have to sit there and talk with people who say, “What is this all about?” “What are women talking about?” “What is the problem?” So there is this very challenging dialogue going on, and I personally have an appreciation for both sides and the necessity for cooperation between both sides because without it, it would be impossible—governments if they didn't have strong civil society, advocacy setting the ceiling—kicking and screaming and whining doesn't matter—but setting the ceiling way high, then it would be very hard to get to some level of agreement.

So, in this year as we were talking and discussing, we had something like 300 side events right across the street from the UN going on and largely focusing on what we want for post-2015. And of course, the members were struggling not to lose ground, not to go back, and that is an element that has been there, unfortunately, year after year for 57 years. The goal that had been set by Beijing and by the population conference and that declaration, there were so progressive that with the changes in the political climate, with the changes in the financial climate—because of the losses that happened in so many economies—you really have to run to keep still. So that's why, for instance, that after we started planning for another big women's conference, we sort of together decide not to because we might lose the Beijing Platform or what we had gained. So again, that background and I think the agreement that resulted was a really positive step. We really got reaffirmation of the main points and ideas of Beijing agreement on a lot of the issues that we were very adamant about, for instance, having a stand-alone item on women in the new decisions in the new policy commitments in 2015. That was something that was a great achievement...

Ellis: Could you explain that for those who are not sure what the stand-alone is?

Afkhami: Sure, we tried to have specific mention of the importance of gender as the specific and stand-alone and not mixed with other ideas. That separate from all of the other things because we want it also mainstream because we have been saying for years, “All issues are women's issues.” So we can't talk about health, we can't talk about economic development, we can't talk about technology, we can't talk about anything human beings experience without women having a role in it. So, when we're talking about all these other agreements, we have to have gender as a piece of it. So we want to both mainstream women into all of the other aspects of the decisions that are made, but at the same time, we want to stand alone. Possibly, the very first thing that is being said, is that gender is the moving element—the motor behind all of these other things that we want for ourselves as the human race develops itself in the years to come.

There were challenges that the governments weren't able to overcome, even with a push from the NGOs, one being the kind of statement we wanted about the family—maybe Sharon, the Ambassadors, or some of the others would want to comment on that. We weren't able to have the kind of inclusive egalitarian concept of the family as we wished for. It was too much for some states to tolerate. What we got on sexual and reproductive rights—specifically on sex education—some would have liked a formulation that was a little more progressive; all in all, it something to be very positive about and very happy about.

Now, most people are probably familiar with these new and historical developments, but those involved in our partnership—these are people who work in 20 countries—are not our branches and they're not separate from us, they are us: they are our programmatic board. We have 20 indigenous organizations on the ground, which together comprise the Women's Learning Partnership. Each organization has its own network; each of them has either a national or a regional network or both. Our privilege is that we talk to our partners constantly, and the fact that we're 1 to 12 hours apart—in terms of communication—technology has proven to be a godsend; without it we would not be able to exist the way we do. So, we are constantly communicating, meeting, and sharing so we can plan each year for the next year. What they have been constantly worried about—and really desperate toward the end of last year—is the situation of human rights. Because of the security environment, because of the extremism, because of the fear that exists in most societies regarding safety, there have been somehow challenges that sometimes may have been overstated, over protected, or more than necessary but in any case, they do infringe upon human rights. And sometimes the idea is that it's not only the security situation—which is an important part of it—but also the nature of communication, the positive side I mentioned. The negative side is that you hear all kinds of things, you get videos of all sorts of things; some of them report on an abuse, or a monstrosity, or an act of whatever, and you don't know if this is real or if this is made up, but it just reaches millions before you know it. So the kind of things we use to do—I don't want to say decades ago—but years ago, was that we use to write an alert and send it to people, fax it to people and so forth—the good old days. [Laughter.] That way, people had time to check, time to see if this is real or not, and there were people who were responsible, there was someone in the government or in the United Nations... Now, the thing goes viral before we even have a chance to check it, to see if it's real or not, and also the people who are responsible are not necessarily governments, so you don't know who to blame, or the governments themselves are going crazy with this. So the nature of human rights activism, the nature of shaming and blaming—which use to have an effect—has been changed.

So we were thinking that somehow we have to have a dialogue, now that we're looking toward 2015, specifically on human rights. We did a longer conference at the New School, parallel to CSW, to have NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, academics who have studied human rights, as well as people on the ground, to look at the issue to see what we do with human rights in this decade, in this century. How do we use the great benefits that technology gives us—in terms of bringing people together and understanding each other's problems and struggles—was one event that a lot people attended; we had these very outstanding people, some of our own people from this area, like Gaye McDougal of Human Rights First, and so forth. We actually videotaped them, and my colleague Catherine who looks very young, but she has actually coproduced 3 excellent documentaries which have been very helpful because they're short, we do them in multiple languages, people show it all over the world, and it really leaves a huge effect. So we taped a lot these people with other footage that we are going to get, we are going to make a video on human rights and what people think of the issue, and we are also producing a manual on human rights advocacy for this century, for this time. So this is one event which I think is going to feed into 2015, more focused. Because sometimes we take that for granted; we say “human rights? Oh everybody knows about human rights, so what's the issue?” but we should reintroduce that issue.

And then we had several side events, also at the church center and in that 200 that went on, but there was a lot of energy, a lot of activism, a lot of interest all through. I also had a panel that the EU organized which was good to see where they were in their deliberations. But all in all, I think we came

out with a sense of hope and a sense of possibility, in spite of the fact that we work in the Middle East or Africa, and we know how many issues—the issues we’re dealing with in that part of the world exists everywhere because we work in Latin America and Central Asia and so forth—but right now it’s sort of the eye of the storm. For instance, in that part of the world, again I’ll end with this, they are experiencing war, they are experiencing violence, they are experiencing a form of extremism that we have never known in the area, but at the same time—I don’t know if the ambassador would like to comment on that—but our partners think that a new space is there for sure; that there is a newness to the atmosphere that allows them to think, allows them to bring up new ideas whether they win or not, but in the end it starts with the woman, with the one woman, with the individual woman, and then women in groups and they feel that, many of them possibly for the first time—and you know that 70% of the population is below the age of 30—they feel that yes we can do things, we can think, we can come up with new ideas we can struggle. And that very energy, it may not be today it may not be tomorrow, but that energy is extraordinary, and people feel it and they’re invigorated by it. So they were very much involved in this whole process, and I think that all of that leaves us with a lot of work to do but the kind of work that leaves you with a positive and enthusiastic feeling. So thank you for your attention. [Applause.]

Ellis: So Ambassador would you like to say anything, otherwise I’m going to call on Sharon Kotok, who was on the U.S. delegation, to say a few words, then any other diplomats, then I’ll ask one or two questions and we’ll open it up, and I think we’ll have a very rich conversation.

Afkhami: Sure.

Ambassador Al Mughairy of Oman: Thank you very much this has been very informative. It’s very interesting, the way you’ve explained it. I have a couple of questions: number one is, you’ve mentioned early on that there are 50 countries who are members?

Afkhami: 45

Al Mughairy: Are these geographically distributed and are these elected? The second thing is: the Middle East right now is the “eye of the storm,” everybody has their eyes on the Middle East right now with what’s going on. Even those who don’t know where the Middle East is are now talking about the Middle East. How would you address culture and the woman’s right? That I’m sure is going to be a very difficult thing but I would be very interested how you address that. Thank you.

Ellis: Why don’t you take those two questions, then we’ll go to Sharon, and then we’ll continue.

Afkhami: Actually the geographic distribution of the 45: we have 13 people from Africa, 11 from Asia, 9 from Latin America, 8 from Western Europe, and 4 from Eastern Europe. The governments of course, decide who from their country they want to send. Sometimes they send people from NGOs, sometimes they send people from their foreign office, sometimes a combination.

And then in terms of the very important question of culture and rights—to say it as quickly as possible—in all of the years that I have worked on the grassroots level as well as the policy level, in these countries I’ve never been in a gathering where you ask a grassroots group of women “what do you want for your daughter?” I don’t think we should ask “what do you want for yourself?” because parts of the world are so self-sacrificing that “oh, I don’t want anything for myself” and it truly ends up that way, that they get nothing for themselves. But you ask “what do you want for your daughters?” and around the room they come up with the declaration of human rights. There’s hardly anything in the universal declaration that they don’t want. The only thing is—and this is something I’ve found when I was at the university teaching as a young professor in Iran—among my students—I taught English literature—they read English works of fiction and they loved the idea of the rights that these women had and the decisions they could make, but what they wanted was their own context. They don’t want to lose their parents’ esteem, they don’t want to lose their traditions, they don’t want to lose their roots, but they

want to have rights. In the west there's been time to do that gradually, and make indigenous the rights that we want. Remember in the United States all MEN are created equal, all protestant white men. [Laughter.] It took a long time before others got involved, but there they have no time because they're getting this bombardment and so they start thinking, "what's wrong with us?" But the more we do this, the more we allow people find indigenous ways of implementing universal rights, the better it is—and that's the whole purpose of my organization—that is, we create curriculums with grassroots organizations, and they implement it themselves not a Dutch person, not a French person, or an American person, but the person from that country from that culture. So I think that is the way to go; rights are universal, but implementation has to be contextual. So I hope that's an answer.

Ellis: Okay, Sharon let's pass this over to you. Sharon was a member of the U.S. delegation and has worked at the State Department for many years on women's issues. So, give us the inside view here [laughter] on what the U.S. sense of it was, what were the issues they were happy about, and maybe things that didn't come out the way they wanted them to...

Sharon Kotok: Well first of all I have to say, I was a public member of the U.S. delegation; so I am no longer at the State Department—

Ellis: It's okay we'll accept that. [Laughter.]

Kotok: So I actually, have not been involved in any of the post-CSW discussions at the State Department. This last CSW was my 18th CSW—my first CSW was in 1989—and I know that the CSWs can often times be challenging—that's part of an understatement [laughter]. As we were preparing for the Beijing women's conference—between 1993 and 1995—the negotiations were really, really tough, and a lot of us thought we would end up with a horrible document. It wasn't until after we had adopted the document and we were reading it on the plane ride home, that we thought: "Oh my god, how did we get such a fantastic document" because I think that the negotiations—even up until the last minute—were really dreadful. From 1995 to 2000 we really made a lot of progress at the CSW, and in 2000 we had the 5-year review of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action, which is when the rollback really started to occur—not necessarily in the document, but in the will of the member states. One of my good friends told me: "Beijing must've been so successful that a lot of countries are afraid of it, and they want to make sure we don't make further progress." So I think the CSW—from 2000 up until a few weeks ago—was really, really challenging. Overall, I think we kept ground but it's not like we broke any new ground, it's almost like—as Mahnaz says: "we have to run to stay in place." So, I share Mahnaz's concern that a 5th world conference on women would roll back the wonderful gains we made in Beijing, so I think that we have to keep on working. Also—to what Mahnaz had said about the NGOs—the NGOs inspire us to achieve greater heights, and there were a lot of wonderful discussions going on in the side events of the CSW, so I think that NGOs will really move this forward.

Ellis: I just want to ask the two of you, what are the biggest problem areas that everyone is worried about, and what kind of progress was made on violence against women? But also, what about conflict, and development, and management of human resources, along with other things... what are the most pressing concerns from the point of view of many countries, including the U.S.?

Kotok: Well one of the exciting things—and this was actually happening in more of the side events than actually at the discussion at the CSW, and Mahnaz referred to this as well—is the discussion of the post 2015 development agenda, which will be the development agenda beginning in 2015 to 2030 which is the next development agenda after the millennium development goals. One of the goals that was suggested by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons is building peaceful societies and effective and inclusive institutions. I think that was one of the first times that in the UN—outside of the Security Council—that there's been a real link between conflict and development. The High Level Panel of Eminent Persons Report says that you cannot ignore that conflict has a really adverse effect on development, so I'm hoping that member states say that we have to make sure that we try to avoid

conflict, and the best way to avoid conflict is to include women in conflict resolution, peace building, and to stop violence against women, and I think that that's a very positive development.

Ellis: So Mahnaz, what is the issue about the family, that everyone was concerned about, that didn't quite work?

Afkhami: There's been what some of us call—and we have to accept the risk of some of us calling it that—the “unholy alliance” between the Catholic Church and some of the more conservative Muslim societies. There has been a really united and strong front to try to keep the family in the form it is—that is, even something like the age of marriage, even something like female genital mutilation...—these are matters for great discussion among those groups. We have to be really careful about not calling any particular religion as if that religion is particularly backward. There's certain—neither Catholicism nor Islam of course, nor any of the others—it's just the ways certain governments or certain groups use their power in order to backup certain ideas that they believe in, and we've all heard here—what kind of rape was it? “Legitimate.” [*Laughter.*] So just because somebody says, “legitimate rape,” it doesn't mean that. Basically, there's a lot of power within these groups at certain times, especially if they put their focus on one issue—and with the matter of the family, the people at CSW were trying to promote a more egalitarian family, in terms of gender and marriage equality between same-sex couples. That—of course—would not go at all, but even inclusiveness between heterosexual spouses was an issue. But you mentioned a good point about violence against women. In the MDGs, it hadn't been paid attention to as much—and here—it was specifically focused on—especially domestic violence—which was a very important thing to have included.

Ellis: Would any of the diplomats, like Mabel, our colleague from Australia, or any other country represented here like to jump in? We'd be happy to hear from you.

Ambassador Mabel Gómez-Oliver of Mexico: You underscore the standalone item of women as part of the progress that came out of the CSW. What would you consider successful or a step forward coming from the new policy commitments across the 2015 development agenda? How do you envisage the outcome for women on the agenda that will take place in 2015?

Ellis: Let's take a few more questions; we'll open it up here.

Question: My name is Marjorie Scott. About seven years ago, I was asked by the then-ambassador Ellie Azulay's wife's sister, to go to Tripoli, Libya to talk about human rights for women. It was suggested that I call the State Department regarding protocol. What does protocol have to do with all of this?

Ellis: Okay, any other questions? We'll take three at a time.

Question: My name is Lucy Gettmen and I'm very interested in the role of technology in this meeting, in terms of: “I've got lots of tweets during the meeting...” and did it have an influence on the policy? How is technology making a difference?

Ellis: Why don't you take those, then we'll take another round.

Afkhami: Mabel, the idea of “what would the standalone do for us, and what do we want...” What our wish list would be, would be to have a very strong statement that any of the areas of development that we're interested in—human development, financial, economic, political, all areas of development—are intimately intertwined with women, the woman's right, and the inclusion of women. That statement has been made strong, it has been made before, it has been made all over the place in all sorts of things, but in this particular document, if it would be the top saying “everything coming below depends on the first one” that would be something that would help us. It would get through to some governments as well. Then of course—when we're talking about technology for instance—we would talk about the

importance of the inclusion of women in skill-building and access to technology. One of the other major things that we asked for and was included already—but we hope that it will be more strongly paid attention to—is the care giving role that women have. Care giving now is almost universally done by women, especially care giving for elders; women are the ones doing the care giving—and almost always without any compensation—so we ask for some commitment on behalf of societies toward elder care, so that women will not be the only care givers, or at least have some compensation for it.

There are a variety of things that we need to talk about, but I'm going to ask if Catherine can say something quickly about technology—she's our technology guru.

Catherine: The main thing that I will say about technology's impact on CSW—well first, the most important impact is that it allows people from across the globe—and at the grassroots—to be able to follow and know what's going on, and to participate in the dialogue. Because of money, most people who are very engaged in these issues can't be present there, so technology allows another way for female and male activists at the grassroots level to participate in the conversation, as well as help to shape those conversations, because they can tweet in their questions to different parallel events.

At the same time, technology facilitates greater communication among activists, government officials, and UN representatives who are there amongst each other, so you can have a wave of pressure highlighting the issues that are most important to the people who are working on those issues.

Ellis: And what about the follow-up? You're disseminating information from people who were there. She had said you had done some interviews...

Catherine: Yes, in terms of the film?

Ellis: Yes.

Catherine: Well right now is a great example. I know many of us in this room are probably tweeting away, that's why I've had my head down most of the time. [*Laughter.*] So again, it allows for that follow-up, that pressure, especially in between CSW and the conversations about the sustainable development goals; it allows for that momentum to continue after the fact, when everybody goes back to their own constituents and furthers the conversation with people like all of us who are in this room, who weren't necessarily there at the CSW.

Ellis: Thank you.

Afkhami: Just to add to what Catherine was saying, we have had several conversations—international conversations—that have been done digitally about the themes of CSW. It involves everybody—from Malaysia to Bahrain—and people can come in with their ideas, they can hear about what was done, and one of the films that we produced has such crazy stuff that happened that you can't believe. It's only sent as a link, people in Nepal picked it up, they dubbed it into Nepalese, they showed it on television, and they had a Q&A that people could call in and discuss the film—the film was on violence against women. So, without technology, how could we possibly have access to Nepal? It's just miraculously—I hate to use this word—viral. Is there a better word for viral that's not disease oriented? [*Laughter.*]

Ellis: Lucy, could you just tell everyone—Lucy taught a course or gave a lecture and had your students do this so—

Gettmen: I'm adjunct faculty at American University, and during my weekend intensive on women and politics this month, one of the actions for their final paper—for the students— was to watch the meeting online for a certain amount of hours and then journal on it, and then write a final paper on it, so it was a brilliant opportunity to bring their classroom learning to reality.

Ellis: Great, other questions?

Scott: She didn't answer mine yet.

Afkhami: Yes, sorry— protocol. Lovely thing protocol. [*Laughter.*] Actually—from my own experience—it's a nuisance, but also in a way it keeps us talking to each other. If there weren't some rules of the game, and some "what you should and should not say," or "what things to approach and not approach"—it's like etiquette—why use this particular knife or whatever, it's a courtesy to the person next to you. Some of it is really good in the sense that you follow certain rules, and if something upsets your host, you don't talk about it—at least not there—because it makes it easier to say it in some other way that would be more easily understood.

Ellis: Very diplomatic. [*Laughter.*]

Scott: I think that's where the cultural effect comes in, and it's overwhelming, because I'm from Tuscan Arizona, where "that's just the way it is." We just talk very liberally and...

Afkhami: Yes that's true—but you see on the other hand—there are a lot of protocols on how to talk to you, because there's certain words that you don't use, certain gender specifics, certain others that you're very careful about that someone else may not care about. For instance, my nephew was going to school in London, and he kept calling this person—who was black—African American, but the guy turns around and says "I'm neither African nor American, I'm Jamaican!" [*Laughter.*] So sometimes you have to know how to say things that are accurate but not offensive, so we have it among ourselves, we just don't notice our own.

Ellis: I saw a hand in the back, if you would please stand up.

Question: My name is Shelby Quast and I am the senior policy advisor for Equality Now!, but I also sit on the steering committee for the Coalition for Adolescent Girls. I have a question about looking at the lifecycle of a woman, and often times we look at this when she's reached the age of maturity. How do we look at this—including adolescent girls, where much of this happens, where much of the consent happens on her behalf or child marriage or FGM, or violence, or rape—where systems aren't really open to adolescent girls in any country, including this one. I'm curious how that plays into what you saw at CSW, but also how that plays into post 2015...we saw a lot of adolescent girls at CSW so I was just curious about your thoughts on that.

Afkhami: I was very pleased to see so many very young people. A lot of them from the developing world—especially from Africa—it was reassuring how brilliant how courageous, outgoing, and involved they were; it was really, very, very gratifying. It's one of the main areas of emphasis in everything that is discussed and also in the final document. Adolescent girls are the key and they are the future. Since they are the ones who can begin, by their own action, to impact how society shapes itself. So, we're hoping to get as much as possible. We've had pretty good results from the MDGs on education, especially primary education. We almost, almost got our goal—I don't know if anyone has exact numbers—but we almost did and we will be at our goal by 2015. It's gratifying to see that that work has led to these adolescent girls being able to present themselves in the international scene and I'm sure that they will impact the future a great deal. But it is everyone's focus area.

Ellis: Mahnaz, there was some talk about a proposal to ensure that a woman could be the next Secretary General at the UN. But somehow this wasn't really discussed or raised and do you have any information about that? Or Sharon, do you know anything about that?

Kotok: I don't know anything about that.

Afkhami: Well my son went to get a bonus and he said a number and his boss said, “You’re dreaming in Technicolor.” [*Laughter.*] I think that we’re probably dreaming in Technicolor to think that we are going to have a woman SG. But, why not? If you are going to dream, why not dream in Technicolor?

Ellis: Do we need some ground swell on this, that’s all?

Afkhami: What we need is actually to focus on somebody—and there are plenty of women who are qualified—if we focus on one or two women to feature and build momentum in Technicolor, I think there is no reason why we won’t. But I think it would also be good to think who the next SG will be coming from—Sharon, aren’t we going to Europe next? Yes, so we have to think of the geographic as well so that we don’t have from an area which—we can’t have another Asian, for instance, right now. So if we go to the West—and there are plenty of fantastic women there—and build up momentum, I think we have a good chance. And there’s no reason why not. We have built enough consciousness and enough credibility...why not? I think it’d be a great idea. It doesn’t mean just because she is a woman she is going to have our interests in mind. After all, she is going to be running a group of governments. But nevertheless, it honestly makes a huge difference.

Ellis: Well what do you think the requirements would be—does it have to be—there are many women leaders or women foreign ministers and ministers of defense. But do have to of had UN experience as well?

Afkhami: I don’t think so...

Al Mughairy: No, not necessarily. Ban Ki-moon didn’t have previous UN experience. Boutros-Ghali didn’t have UN experience either. You have to be nominated by your government first.

Ellis: Okay well that could be a problem. [*Laughter.*]

Afkhami: American support helps a great deal even though we think that we don’t have that kind of influence, but we really do. American support would be very, very important.

Al Mughairy: I believe we just missed Heng Chee of Singapore if Ban Ki-moon wasn’t going—because at the time Heng Chee would have been perfect and they were ready to nominate her but the Asians had decided

Ellis: This is the former Ambassador of Singapore to the United States and was here for fifteen years. Yes, very accomplished woman. I think the idea is to get a list together and get people thinking about it.

Question: My name is Pascale-Emmanuelle Nouama and I’m from Jhpiego—I know it’s a very strange name for an organization that is an affiliate of Johns Hopkins—and we focus on women’s health and their families. I would like to know if there is anything in the works—in terms of 2015—around health. Because these are serious issue—mainly in the developing world—we’re talking about cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and also serious problems for mothers and children. So I wanted to know if there is anything in the works, if there’s anything you guys are doing.

Afkhami: Well health was a very significant piece of the discussions, and much of what you’re referring to was included in the final statement—including maternal mortality—which was in the MDGs. Unfortunately, with maternal mortality—even though it was a specific mention in the MDGs—not as much as we wish has been done, because things like maternal mortality—or some of the others—or just care for mothers...it’s not a matter of simply putting focus on it, it’s a matter of development. That is, if you do not have roads to go from one place to a hospital, if you don’t have doctors who are available within some reasonable distance—if you don’t have even the most elementary services like transportation, human resources, skilled personnel—and skills can be developed at different levels—you don’t have to have a specialist in some field to take care of simple issues that can kill a mother. So

there has to be will, there has to be resources, but also fundamental development—in terms of transportation, communication, skills available, and so forth. We have 600,000 women dying in childbirth each year—you would think that something like that could be taken care of—but it involves so many other things.

For next year, we're hoping that a lot of that focus will be on health issues—but also reproductive rights for population control, for young women's health, etc. Health issues were a great focus, and were mentioned multiple times in the agreement.

Ellis: Any other questions?

Question: I'm Rekha Mehra from Creative Associates. I was wondering about the economic issues—I know Beijing was very central to looking at women's international economic issues, but I would be interested to know what happened at this event, and looking toward 2015 as well.

Afkhami: If anyone has a specialty in any of these fields—please come in—because I'm not a specialist in these topics, I only know what I saw in negotiations. But in terms of economics, one of the things that the NGOs focused on was the discrepancy in incomes that are happening around the world. This incredible difference in levels of income and poverty—that goes on even when countries are getting richer and using their resources better—is huge. The culture of materialism and ownership of things that seem to be running the markets, also seem to be taking the place of grassroots development.

There are a number of papers on foundational attention to discrepancies of income—they talk about how to shift back from this culture of material acquisition and competition in terms of ownership of material things. I hate to talk about capitalism per se, but there was a lot of talk about "Runaway Capitalism," a limitless, boundary-less, support of capitalism at the cost of certain social services for all. So, I think there is a lot of attention on the changes in the fundamental economic relationships.

Ellis: I'm just wondering why you thought that things were more positive this year after all this time when there was such a negative environment and fighting to hold the line?

Afkhami: I'm generally more optimistic than I ought to be, but I honestly think that a new generation is coming forward, and that generation relates to each other differently. For instance, we have a tech festival in Jordan every year where we gather 150 young women from across the region to work on technology within a specific subject—like economic empowerment or violence—you see these young men and women working together—of course there's 60% women and 40% men, just in case. [*Laughter.*] But they work together in almost a gender neutral way. They work together on issues—for instance they worked on violence against women—the men were making short one minute videos as a way to focus on the issue. They're doing it as their own thing—not because the festival focused on women—they are doing it for themselves, and I think they are our future: they are connected, they learn from each other, they have access to information—they can Google anything and learn what's happening anywhere. [*Laughter.*] These people are not the same people who are running the world now, and they'll be there before you know it—they'll be there in ten years—and I think we are missing the idea of supporting THEM—not supporting the issues that were created from our mistakes in the past. I think people are realizing it—some of the governments are realizing it—because the people on the street are fifteen, eighteen years old—and they're courageous, they don't have our fears or timidity—we see their power, their innovations, their aspirations and it's going to be quite a different world. I think we would be wise to plan for that world—not the world of 10 years ago—and if we support their aspirations, I think the world is going to be a much better place than we fear.

Ellis: Well, that's very positive! Well this is a wonderful place to end, because it gives us it gives us some hope and encouragement—and to all the young people in the room—the world is your oyster.

Please take it and do great things. So thank you again Mahnaz, it was wonderful to have you.
[Applause.]