



II CONFERENCE

Cooperation for Development and Non-Governmental Organisations. Working in the Middle East, Region of Conflicts. Women and Human Rights

Madrid, 25th November 2009

Closing speech

-Janice Smith-

For those of you who do not know me and were not at dinner last night, let me just say that I represent here the Heritage Foundation and I am very honoured to be here, to be part of this centre and listen. Really to learn which is why I came and I am very honoured to be able to say a few remarks to this esteemed group. Pilar and I met about five years ago when I brought her to the State Department where I worked to help the Us Government figure out how to do reconstruction and democracy promotion and education reform and all of this things that the Foundation is working on, on the ground, with the people of the Middle East and to do it better. So since then I have been a big fan as well of what the Foundation is doing. This has been an incredibly and extraordinary opportunity for me to engage and to listen and I would take back far more to the Foundation, to people I work with them in the United States and I can possibly give you.

So all I can do now is just thank you very much but also give you just a few wrap-ups about the things that I have heard and that I believed is very important, the timeliness of this event, several people have talked about that, it is incredible, given the Pope's visiting and Obama's remarks and the opportunity that so many feel that his remarks have given for a new dialogue, for a new awareness of all the problems that are going on there, for new recognition. And it has opened up a door and but as many have said in the press around the world, now we wait to see what happens and it is a critical time, I have heard many people when I talked to who feel is a window of opportunities that cannot be missed or things will get worse. They have a very pessimistic view and I have a hard time being pessimistic. I think that as many people have pointed out today, there are strengths in this region, and in this peoples and in these fragmented societies that a resilience and a determination that if we can just channel it correctly, if we can affirm the things will build that cohesiveness, the choices that they make will lead to change if sometimes people will get out of the way.

I think that the answer is from people on the ground, not necessarily people from afar. There have been positive signs of hope in the Muslim world as it is referred to that I cannot ignore, the Human Rights are very important and I am so glad that it came up today and the issue of freedom is absolutely important because without the human and social capital in development, as Diego said, no political solution will work. If you do not have, if you do not give the people what they need to improve their lives no political solution will work.

We have seen in Indonesia in just ten years what has happened in a society of 240 million people where 86 per cent identify themselves as Muslims, a pluralism develop where all sexes and ethnic group and everybody set everything aside and followed a student movement to transform that society. It is still transforming, democracies do not sit still, democracies have to reaffirm their principles and their believes through generations, and there are always challenges that change it. So there always be struggles. We have seen in Kuwait now the first four woman elected to parliament. There are things that are moving the process of human rights and democracy and freedom forward, and building the strength and the people that are needed to find the solution overall.

The fragmentation is serious, it is certainly a situation that you cannot even imagine how human nature can put up with some of the things that are going on now in the Holy Land and in the Middle East. But there are realities there, and there is a resilience there, and a determination that we have to focus and capitalize on. We do know there is a lack of trust, a lack of will, a lack of leadership, a lack of confidence, there is so many things we can work on.

We need to identify the people and the groups and the influences that will help us move the ball forward. Religion does play a large part. We cannot—America's situation is a little bit different, you can take it or leave it -- your experience, but we have not secularised as many would describe it. When we talk about a very religious society – we just had another survey-- I think last month where 82 per cent said they still practise their faith daily and weekly. They just find, what America tried to do was find a protection in its constitution for those people to practice from a government that tried to take those rights away. So the constitution did not provide a separation as much it provided a protection for religious freedom, and I think that religious freedom is one of those things that is playing out on the Middle East that everybody can learn from. It is something that you have to protect to move the ball forward, to provide a space for people to have the freedom of conscience, freedom of decision, freedom of association and all the other things that we have talked about.

I am a mother and I must tell you that the birth of a new creation is never easy and we are talking about the birth of a new creation in the Middle East. The child itself suffers more than the mother does, than the parents do. Everything they knew from the previous existence is no longer true when they become a new creation. They do not know what to expect, the future is uncertain, but the reality is, it is the warmth and the love of people that bring that creation to its fulfilment and that is what is so remarkable about this group. Everybody here cares very much about what happens in the Middle East and to me it is very encouraging that so many different sides come together and they are able to discuss honestly and openly a dialogue about what to do for this creation that we want to see, this creation which serves the justice and the human rights and the development of everybody. We all believe its a critical moment and if we leave, I think what this conference has done is give us a vision of how we can take what happened here back home to the communities that we deal with, and work for a solution on the ground.

Thank you very much.