



Interview With Hanif Sherzad of Radio Afghanistan

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kabul, Afghanistan

October 12, 2005

QUESTION: Madame Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude for saving your precious time to give this exclusive interview for Radio Afghanistan.

Since your second visit to Afghanistan, what changes do you think have taken place since your previous visit?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, when I was here before, Afghanistan had had one election but it had not yet had the election of the parliament, which has now taken place, which means that Afghanistan's political process and political consolidation of democracy is moving forward.

This is an historic time for Afghanistan. A page has been turned -- a freely elected president, a freely elected parliament -- and on that basis now, I think that Afghanistan can go on to meet the many challenges ahead -- the challenges on the economic side. I know that the Afghan people want very much to have a good life and so encouraging business development and economic development. I know that there are still security concerns in the country and we are working with our partners in the international community to improve the security situation, but the Afghan military forces and police forces are also being built. And then finally, I know that there are still concerns about narcotics and that President Karzai has been telling the Afghan people that it is very important -- not to plant the poppy but to have legitimate economic development.

And so there's a big challenge ahead but Afghanistan changes every day for the better.

QUESTION: You're traveling to this region, yesterday you were in Kyrgyzstan, today in Afghanistan and you're traveling to Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. So what's the importance of this visit to the United States of America? And how do you see the future of this region?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm glad you asked about the region because as a region this area has tremendous potential. This was once one of the real crossroads of the world; a center of cultural development, the center of economic development and the Silk Road came right through here. And I believe that the future of this region is to, again, be an area where cultural and economic development is strong.

The region has had to overcome many very difficult problems -- civil wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, of course, the rule of the Soviet Union over much of the area. But now is the time when a regional development strategy where trade barriers are lowered between the countries, where economic development takes place, where markets are developed. And let me just say we believe that this should be a development that includes everyone, including, we hope, that Russia will have a very good and positive role to play in this region. It has natural ties here and that's important.

QUESTION: You also mentioned the security. As you know, terrorist forces are still creating problems for the people of Afghanistan. They are killing the intellectuals, religious scholars and doctors, engineers; especially recently, they killed parliamentary candidates. How long it will take to put an end to terrorism in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, unfortunately, it's always possible for a few people to use violence to bring misery to many people. And we are going to continue to fight. We are going to continue to fight with the Afghan military forces and Afghan police forces. We have, of course, forces here from NATO and from around the world.

The terrorist cannot win if the Afghan people continue their political and economic development. If the Afghan people are determined that the terrorist will be found and arrested and that they will not allow them to hide in the shadows, in villages. The Afghan people have an important role to play in defeating the terrorists. It is my hope that now with the parliamentary elections done that all Afghans will now see that the road ahead and the future is on the political front, not in violence.

QUESTION: After the defeat of the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan was forgotten by its friends. As a result of that Afghanistan has changed to the terrorist nest. Can we be sure that the American friends will not abandon us again?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. America is here to stay as a partner and friend for Afghanistan. Not only have we now also sacrificed along side Afghans for the liberation of Afghanistan, I mean, there are American men and women who have died to help liberate Afghanistan -- that's a bond, that that will never be broken.

We also understand that our own interests were hurt tremendously when we abandoned this area the last time and we're not going to make that mistake again. It is absolutely the case that military forces will change, the structure will change over time as the conditions demand and Afghan military and police forces are taking more of the load. That's only appropriate. But you can be sure that we have a long-term commitment to Afghanistan, as long as the Afghan people want our partnership and friendship they will have it.

QUESTION: In the past two decades, almost all social, economic and cultural infrastructures in Afghanistan was ruined first by the Soviet invasion, then by the civil war and then by the Taliban despotic regimes. Now, Afghanistan needs a lot of assistance. And what's your view regarding this assistance, for the international community and the United States in particular?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Afghanistan does need and deserves international assistance and it can come in many forms. There are international development banks that are involved and should be more involved here in Afghanistan. The United States will continue to provide reconstruction and infrastructure assistance. We have helped to finish the Ring Road from Kabul to Kandahar and we will continue to work those issues. We are going to continue to provide financing for health and for education.

And I was just talking with a remarkable group of women business entrepreneurs. Obviously, the development of small businesses is very important. Any economy really grows because of small business development, not big businesses but small business development. And so I think you will see us to make a major effort there. And we'll also hope that the donor community may reconvene, may get together again soon, after the completion of the Bonn process, which has just taken place. There needs to be a new round of donor assistance as well.

QUESTION: You mentioned Afghan women. Afghan women are very happy to see you again in Afghanistan. And you mentioned you met with some businesswomen and entrepreneurs. So as an elite female politician, what will be your message, generally, for the Afghan woman?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, my message for Afghan women is that there is now a possibility that they can achieve whatever they want to achieve. Women have been elected to the parliament. I know that there are women business ventures, that women are involved in the security forces.

I know that it is not easy and that there have been many years in which women were oppressed in this society. But I'm meeting so many women who have one thing in mind and that's to make a better Afghanistan.

And so my message is to women that they have an opportunity to do what they want now; but my message is also to all of Afghanistan, including the men of Afghanistan, that half a democracy is not a democracy. Women need to be full partners for Afghanistan. You need every single Afghan woman and man to make the future better. And so I would hope that men would welcome women as equal partners in the development of the new Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So last question was about the men, you already covered. (Laughter.) Thank you very much, indeed. I do appreciate your time.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

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