



## Interview with Khabar Television

### A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs

U.S. Embassy Almaty  
Almaty, Kazakhstan  
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**QUESTION:** Good day Mrs. Jones. Please tell us the purpose of your visit to Kazakhstan. Is it only to open the Embassy in Astana or do you also plan to have some meetings?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** Of course opening the [Branch Office of the] Embassy in Astana is very important, it's a very emotional, very positive, development for U.S.-Kazakhstan relations. But more importantly, I've come to Kazakhstan and to other countries in the region to talk about our bilateral relations, and to talk about all of the work that we have to do together both to fight terrorism, but also to promote civil society, to promote economic reform, to promote all of the issues that will result in prosperity and political choice for the people of the region.

**QUESTION:** Can you tell us with whom you are planning to have these meetings, with government officials or other officials?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** I look forward to meeting with the Prime Minister tomorrow, with the director of the Presidential administration, with the acting Foreign Minister, with the Minister of Information and the Minister of Justice.

**QUESTION:** Can you tell us how you evaluate current U.S.-Kazakhstani relations?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** Relations are good between our two countries, but as I mentioned earlier, we have many, many issues on our agenda that we need to work on. We would really like to see a lot of progress with civil society, we would like to see a lot more progress on development of free media, we've been disappointed with some of the events of the past year, year-and-a-half on media. Too many news organizations have been closed down. There is still the sense that there is not freedom in media organizations.

We are also working with government and non-governmental organizations [NGOs], and with the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe], on the election law, with some more improvement needing to be done there. And we look forward very much to having a very intense conversation with members of the government and members of civil society to push these issues forward, because only then can the United States and Kazakhstan have a genuinely productive relationship.

**QUESTION:** You said that one of the questions will be the mass media. You know that we are preparing a new draft media law. What can you say about it?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** The media law is a problem. There has been a tremendous amount of discussion about the areas in the media law that are insufficient. I am not an expert on all the details. I've been pleased by the amount of discussion there is about the media law and the importance of it to demonstrating that Kazakhstan really is a country that can move forward, that can become a leader in the OSCE, that can become more associated with the international institutions that it should.

**QUESTION:** It is known that the U.S. Government is going to allocate \$87 billion [\$87,000 million] dollars to reconstruct Afghanistan and Iraq after the war. Is it also planned to attract neighboring countries to help rebuild the infrastructure of these states? Kazakhstan is closer to Afghanistan, is it possible that Kazakhstan will participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** Of course, that's the short answer to the question. It is very, very important for Afghanistan's development and Iraq's, but let's focus on Afghanistan because that's closer.

It is very much a part of the region. We see huge possibilities for a country like Kazakhstan to be a trading partner with Afghanistan, but more important right now, Kazakhstan is offering assistance to Afghanistan and Iraq. That is a very, very important signal of Kazakhstan's desire to be part of the bigger community of international peacekeeping and of international reconstruction. We look forward very much to developing the transportation routes between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, to develop trade from Afghanistan back and forth to Central Asia.

All of these things are terribly important for Afghanistan and for Kazakhstan because it has so much to offer. The other area I think that Kazakhstan can really help with is expertise. There are a tremendous number of people in Kazakhstan who are engineers, who are medical professionals, who can help with reconstruction, who can do some of the university teaching, some of the very professional work that needs to be done in Afghanistan.

**QUESTION:** Is the United States planning to increase its presence in the Central Asian region? What is your opinion about the Russian air base in Kyrgyzstan that is close to the U.S. airbase in Manas?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** We already have a large presence in every one of the Central Asian countries. Our presence has been here for some time, through our assistance programs, and through military-to-military relationships we have developed with each of the countries in the region. I don't expect the presence to increase because it's already quite large.

The fact that the Russians have opened a base near the base that we use outside of Bishkek is interesting. It is something that we have discussed with the Russians in quite some detail -- principally because we have a very transparent relationship with the Russians in terms of our presence in Central Asia, including the way we use the air base at Ganci for our operations in Afghanistan. We have also made clear to our Russian colleagues that we expect the same kind of transparency as they develop their presence at Kant Airbase. At least at this point, what we suggested is that we need to be able to coordinate our air traffic control to ensure that we don't have any accidents. That would be very important as the first step.

**QUESTION:** And again about the question of security, the UN has the role of peacekeeper, but now Central Asia and Kazakhstan are members of such

organizations on security as the Treaty of Collective Security and the Shanghai Organization. Do you think that the emphasis on regional security systems is a temporary phenomenon?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** I believe that the UN has a function worldwide. It has a very important function to help provide the framework within which countries work. It provides the framework, for instance, like now with the Security Council resolution and the way the international community will work on reconstruction in Iraq, what should be the political future of Iraq. So, it sometimes provides a big framework.

Regional organizations also have a very important role to play because they can focus specifically on dangers in the region for instance, or on working on very specific issues in the region. I believe and the United States believes that regional organizations as well as international organizations all have a very important role to play.

One of the organizations you didn't mention is Partnership for Peace. This, of course, is associated with NATO, and very important in terms of the development of Kazakhstan's ability to participate in peacekeeping operations, which it is now just starting to do in Iraq. That's also a very important organization. It's also a regional organization and not a worldwide organization.

So we look at ways to use every single possible organization, every possible way to attack a problem in the region, whether it's to attack terrorism, to attack trafficking in persons, to promote regional economic integration. All of these issues are important. Any way that they can be worked the best is a good way to work.

**QUESTION:** So they can work in parallel and there won't be any contradiction in this?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** The goal, of course, is to make sure that they don't compete with each other. Competition is not what we're looking for, but to make sure that the programs are either integrated or parallel and complementary. That's the goal, and we talked with members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, for instance, and with any of the other organizations, to make sure that what we do isn't, doesn't duplicate something they are doing that it is either parallel or complementary.

**QUESTION:** Mrs. Jones, it turned out that in the past years Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries came into the crosshairs of interests of different countries, such as the U.S., China and Russia that have views on foreign policy that are absolutely different. How do these states influence the situation in the region?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** I don't think it really does have that much of an influence in the region. Mostly because we the United States spend quite a bit of time making sure that what we, that our goals here, that our policies here in this region are very transparent and very clear in Russia and China but also in Europe and wherever else it may be important for our partners and allies to understand what are goals here are. Our effort is to make sure that as we pursue particular policies here; for example China understands them and maybe even works in a complementary way. For instance, I was in Beijing about three weeks ago for consultations about this region and about, in general, U.S. policies towards the region that I am responsible for. I found a very clear understanding of what it is we do here and why. My primary concern is to make sure that our presence isn't frightening, or that it isn't seen as something that should be objected to by the neighbors in the region. Everything we do here is in their interest as much as it is in ours. Our work here is to counter terrorism, to counter extremism, to work against trafficking in persons, to work against narcotics trafficking, and to work against trafficking in weapons. All of these things are issues that are of mutual interest to all of the countries in the region of China and Russia.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. What is the state of illegal trafficking in persons? What can you say about this? How was it in the past? And what can you say about the state of this problem now after the law on trafficking in persons has been made stricter in Kazakhstan?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** In Kazakhstan there's a new law that is going to make it possible, we hope, to prosecute traffickers and investigate traffickers. We're looking for that to happen. The important thing also is to make sure that it is possible to inform potential targets of traffickers that they are in danger, that they might think they're being hired to work in a hotel in Germany, but in fact they're being hired to work in prostitution.

So what we want to do is make sure that it is clear to people that they need to be careful about jobs that they've taken, and make sure they will work in a hotel and not something worse. But, also, we want to be sure that trafficked women and children, when they come back, are protected both for the sake of reintegration in society, and also so that they can be witnesses against the traffickers who hired them and be protected as they testify in court.

**QUESTION:** In your opinion, what can prevent people from being trafficked?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** The main thing that they need to do -- and I don't know if this is possible in Kazakhstan yet -- but there is in many places a hotline or a place that people can call or go to and say 'I've been hired by this organization, or this organization or this person wants to hire me. Do you know this person? Do you know anything about them?' Because usually traffickers are fairly well known by people who follow this.

I don't know if there is a hotline here, but that would be one of the very good things to pursue and to advertise in schools and on the Internet so that everyone knows that they can pick up the phone and find out.

**QUESTION:** Unfortunately, we don't have such a line. I never heard of such a thing.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** There will be. Or there are some. Maybe we'll do a program with you to advertise this.

**QUESTION:** Maybe. If journalists don't know, then few people know about these lines. Mrs. Jones, can we return to the question of the mass media? I'm interested in your opinion on what should be the main provisions in the law on the mass media in order to guarantee freedom of speech, to help the media to fulfill their functions, and to make sure that journalists are not dependent on anybody or anything.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** I'll do my best. I'm not a specialist in this area, but let me make a few suggestions. In the first place, media organizations need to be self-sufficient, they need to know how to advertise, they need to know how to sustain themselves financially so that they are not dependent on the state, so that they are not dependent on this person or that person. That's fundamental, and it's something that we do training programs in. Second, media law should not be restrictive about the subjects that can be covered in the media. Usually media laws only restrict completely socially inappropriate programs, such as pornography. And usually, an appropriate media law will not restrict the political subjects that can be discussed, it doesn't restrict what can be said about political leaders, all of that should be open.

**QUESTION:** And if that is not included in the law? Frankly, I never read our law, but I never heard that it prohibited discussion on political issues. But, nevertheless you say that not everything is good in our law. How do journalists avoid violating "unwritten" rules of reporting that exist?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** It's good question. I think that one of the sides of the problem is that there are fewer and fewer media organizations in Kazakhstan, and that's not a good thing for the country. Unfortunately, I can't tell you in great detail the specifics of what is not appropriate in the media law, but there are a lot of specialists to talk about it who are able to provide that kind of information.

**QUESTION:** You have worked with Kazakhstan a long time. It would be interesting to know your opinion of how Almaty and Kazakhstan have changed outwardly? Please tell us your personal opinion and not your political opinion. If possible, in Russian.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** [In Russian] There have been very many changes in Almaty. I was here in the 1990s in Almaty. Now, I see a lot of lights at night that weren't here before. There are very many new beautiful buildings everywhere, that also weren't here. But, what I like is that you still have your mountains. They are very beautiful; I miss them a lot.

**QUESTION:** Do you miss Kazakhstan sometimes?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** [In Russian] Of course, of course, always.

**QUESTION:** Do you remember anything else except the mountains?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** [In Russian] I had very good relations with many Kazakhstanis. I always remember the discussions with people that I had and still have now.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES:** Thank you.

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