Thank you. Thank you very much for inviting me

here. I would like to start by saying that the people of Afghanistan

are really sorry and hurt the way the Americans were hurt by the

September 11 incident, the same way we are hurting when our

country is bombed by our own friends.

The only way that will console us on what happened in September

is that we achieve something in Afghanistan and get rid of

the terrorists forever and an explanation for the people of Afghanistan,

those who were directly bombed and hurt and lost loved ones

that here it was necessary, but here I give you peace and stability, a normal life.

Twenty-three years of war in Afghanistan brought lots and lots

of misery upon our country. From the underground irrigation systems

to schools, hospitals, roads, everything, everything, our forests,

national forests were destroyed. Also, women’s situation in Afghanistan.

They became corpses all of a sudden, slowly but all of

a sudden during the Taliban.

The conference in Bonn did open a window for women. It was

good—although I heard two people, but there were five women

present in that meeting, three in the capacity of delegates and two

in the capacity of advisors, and I was one of the advisors.

This conference gave us hope, especially the opening speeches.

When Mr. Qanooni started his speech I thought, my God, we do not

have any problem; maybe in 3 days time we will pack up and go

home, because he was so flexible. He claimed that there was nothing

they wanted, all they wanted is peace and stability and forming

an interim government which will be really broad-based.

When the negotiations started, I was a bit scared, because first

we had a problem over the presence or not presence of peacekeeping

forces in Afghanistan. We had a good 2 days spent on that.

With the exception of the delegation of the Northern Alliance, the

three other delegates, they were absolutely firm upon it that without

peacekeeping forces, an independent force, in Afghanistan, the

government cannot work. I want to add upon that that women

could not have a normal life, because we had experiences even with

Northern Alliance.

Then negotiating, we had meetings room to room and without a

visa, without an airplane, from Peshawahr we were going to Cyprus,

from Cyprus to Rome. These were the rooms, our offices. One

was called Peshawahr, the other Cyprus, and Northern Alliance,

and Rome. So we were just in a matter of a few steps entering from

Rome to Cyprus, from Cyprus to Peshawahr.

We solved lots of problems. Then we were told by the Ambassador

Brahimi that we had to come up with a list of government.

He emphasized that these people would have to be competent, educated,

and also, if possible, not belong to any of the political organizations.

If a competent person happened to be one of the organizations,

that is fine, but otherwise we should try not to have them there.

The result was—I am telling you the truth—I was a bit shocked.

Seventeen seats went to the Northern Alliance out of 30. I had

hoped maybe five very important posts and then ten altogether.

But 17? So it would have been better if we had had the meeting

which had happened in Rome, the Northern Alliance, and the office

of the ex-King, 50 then, 50 that. It would have been even better.

Why should you bother with us being there and not even offer

anything, which we deserved, because the only mistake we have

done is that we put our arms down when the war against the Soviet

Union finished and we did not participate in the civil war.

During the civil war when you define the government——

The majority of the people who did not participate

in the civil war. We were not with the Mujaheddin—we were not

with the Taliban, we were not with the Northern Alliance. We were

the Mujaheddin or people who were civilian refugees who did not take sides.

Some of our very strong Mujaheddin preferred to put down their

forces and accept what was coming from the initiative of the

United Nations, something very similar to what we have today.

But then unfortunately some of our friends had a coup and we

know what happened.

Well, anyway, I have criticism upon this list. I wish it was better

than that. I wish the Northern Alliance had introduced a few

women. We have two women in this government, one introduced by

Rome, the wonderful lady that Dr. Gouttierre talked about, and the

other one, who is also a surgeon, who was introduced by us, who

is also a very remarkable and capable woman. But no women from

the Northern Alliance, although they had 17 seats. Our organization,

the Peshawahr Group so it is called, out of three seats we

gave one to a woman.

But in spite of all that, I still have hope. I really have hope that

this government will succeed. Mr. Qarooni is a very capable person.

Also, I know a few other people from the Northern Alliance. We

were colleagues during the jihad, and I have every faith that they

will be very successful in their job.

Also, Mr. Karzai, whom I have never worked with, but I have

heard that he has a strong personality and indeed he is a Pashtun

who does not want to belong only to his own part of Afghanistan,

but he wants to be shared by everyone.

Now we come to the situation of women. This is the only opportunity

we have to take women back where they used to be, as the

Senator said. We want to go back to the democracy time. I am the

generation of the democracy time. When I was at school, I was 100

percent sure that every door will be open for me, any opportunity,

any seat, as long as I train myself and I educate myself to be worthy

of that seat. I had taken it for granted, and you know that I

was mistaken.

This time we want guarantees for peace in my country, but above

all support for women and eventually a democracy. The subject of

democracy was not mentioned by any of the panelists. I strongly

believe that the Afghan people can have democracy. We always say

that the Afghan people have their own mind. If you have a strong

mind, then democracy is the answer.

I believe that 10 years of democracy in Afghanistan did work. I

remember that my parents were reading newspapers and magazines,

Western magazines and newspapers, commenting that, how

wonderfully these people go to the ballot boxes, as if they have

done it all their life. Because this is a want of any human being,

of course they wanted to go to the ballot boxes.

When we have democracy, I have no fear for women’s status and

I have no fear for ethnic, religious minorities in Afghanistan, because

no matter how extremist one person is, his idea will be worth only one vote.

Now, what provisions should we have for women in the future?

As much as I am grateful for lots of women activists in the West

to support us, they were the only ones who raised their voice when

the governments had forgotten us or they did not have time for us,

but I am also cautious that the Western feminism cannot work in

Afghanistan.

Even if—I am a secularist. When I go, which eventually I want

to be in the parliament hopefully. When I go and ask people to vote

for me, if I tell them that I have a secular ideology, these women

will not vote for me, let alone men.

But during the democracy of Afghanistan from 1963 to 1973, we

proved that an Islamic constitution can give these opportunities for

women to have equal right of education, equal right of work with

the same pay for the same job, and equal opportunity of political

participation. I remember I was maybe 9 or 10 that they were

working upon how could they pay equal pay for men and women,

and I remember a jurist said that when the wife of the Prophet,

who was a cobbler, was making shoes, were her shoes made by her

half price of a shoe that was made by a man? Of course they said

no. Then they said, then why a teacher should take half price or

a female doctor or so on?

So at that time in France women were fighting for having equal

pay. We had it. When we had women in the senate, in Switzerland

women could not vote. We do not want or ask for stars. We want

what we had and we want what we deserve.

I strongly believe that some of our women who are financed or

whatever by the Western sort of feminism should be a little bit

cautious, the American friends and the Afghan friends, because the

situation is so delicate. If we harm this process even a little bit,

it could create big problems. I believe that I have enough evidence

in Islam that we could support all these rights for women from the

Islamic way.

Yes, the Bonn process was not perfect—I close by this—but I accept

it and I would like to see this as an opening door for all of

us. I do not believe that—some people say women were as tokens

there. They were strong women and they were committed. One

thing that we had no problem in Bonn, it was women’s issues.

Maybe only 10 minutes spent on it, because they all agreed, which

is very good.

So I say it again: Do not forget us, because if you forget us we

will have another problem and that problem will harm lots of people

outside Afghanistan’s boundaries. Thank you.

In Afghanistan it is a totally different matter. I was

a student in Iran when the Iranian Islamist revolution started. I

believe that, I strongly believe that, lack of having healthy political

parties in our country pushes us to underground politics. At that

time it used to be Islam and communism and now it is just Islam.

We are educated, whether if it is in Arab countries, in Afghanistan,

or anywhere. The way that we are educated really is Western

education. When you learn all that, then you need to express it.

When you express it, you need parties to express upon. So if you

do not have these opportunities, then you go to extremism.

I remember during—before democracy in Afghanistan, there

were two underground parties, the Islamists and the Communists.

They were really working hard. They were trying to recruit people

from big families, influential rich families. This is exactly what the

Islamists are doing now in the Muslim world. This is exactly what

is happening.

I remember that I was sent by my father to come here 18 years

ago to show our worry about recruiting these non-Afghans in jihad.

Most of these people were quite rich, well off people. I tried so hard

to convince people here that we do not need foreign fighters, we

have enough fighters; we just need defensive weapons.

I think in the other countries it is really lack of expressing their

politics. In Afghanistan what we see with the Taliban, it is an imported

product. Afghanistan became a nest for all kinds of nasty

people, and some of our Arab friends did not help that very much,

because they would say to these naughty boys: Take this toy, go

and play in my neighbor’s yard; leave me have my siesta. That

other yard was our country.

In Afghanistan the war between the rivalry of Wahabism and

Shi’ism was fought. The supremacy—the rivalry between the regional

supremacy of Iran and Pakistan was fought. Any war anyone

had in that region was fought inside Afghanistan. The same

thing, the Taliban or al-Qaeda or whatever came in Afghanistan,

not because the people of Afghanistan wanted it. It became as a

nest for these people.

I do not have a fear from that at all. Actually,

again we are lucky that we did have the experience of those 10

years of democracy. I heard it from one of our quite hard-liner

Muslim Mujaheddin leaders—by the way, I studied during the civil

war—I had the choice between having a nervous breakdown or

studying something else, so I studied Islamic jurisprudence. When

he heard that I was studying this, he said: That is wonderful, but

I tell you one thing, that the constitution that we had in Afghanistan,

it was the best mixture of Islam and modernity. It was created

by the best jurists we had in Afghanistan plus a French expert

in law and a very big share from Al-Azar University from

Egypt.

The person who was behind that constitution, Mohamed Musa

Shafiq, was a jurist, happened to be the last Prime Minister of the

ex-King and he proved to be the most modern and the most pro-

gressive Prime Minister we had. Professor Gouttierre has written

a beautiful chapter in a book about him, that because he was successful,

because democracy was working, because Islam and modernity

showed such a strong bond, the coup happened in Afghanistan,

first with the front, President Daoud, and then a Communist coup.

So I have no fear of any other backlash. Just give us democracy

and you will see that we will show you wonders.

It all came by force, and I am happy it did. During

the time of jihad, I was the only woman in the Afghan politics, not

because other women did not know and could not achieve better

than I did, but only because I had a religious family behind me and

a father what wanted to show that it was all right. Because he was

a religious leader, he was not questioned.

We tried so hard, we tried so hard to bring more women in the

politics of the Mujaheddin. We did not succeed because at that

time, if you remember, in spite of our struggle, the trend was that

help whoever has the biggest beard and the biggest turban. That

was the fancy of the Western countries, especially here, unfortunately.

We were totally marginalized, only because in the eye of the

Western countries, especially here, we looked Western. They forgot

that they have friends in Afghanistan, strong friends. They looked

for higher people and those higher people happened to be the most

radical of the Islamists we saw in the country.

I still do not know why you have done that, and I am happy that

it has stopped and you helped us to stop it. Yes, the situation of

women in Bonn was forced upon all of us. We welcomed it. Our organization

could not bring any women because we had only 3 seats

and we had 15 organizations and parties and Mujaheddin tribesmen

under the umbrella that my father has now and we did not

know how to push a woman. So I virtually pushed myself in this

conference as an advisor.

Those people that had 11 seats, the King brought 2, which was

very good, and the North brought only 1.

I challenged once a representative of the Taliban on

radio BBC that I am going to study Islamic jurisprudence, and I

did it. Now, Senator, I challenge you that in a democratic Afghanistan,

you choose the area, I will go and compete in an election with

any man, against any man you choose.

I am not kidding. I am very serious about that.

In the past in Afghanistan, we had four women in

the first parliament. Only one was from Kabul. The three others,

they were nominated from their own villages, from provinces, and they won.

We had brutality not only upon women. We had

brutality, period.

This is an artificial environment that in Afghanistan

today we live. This is an artificial Afghanistan you see. As I

said earlier, every battle was imported in Afghanistan by those

people who were greedy to find some money and brought these

things.

I assure you, if we pave the way, which I said paving the way

has to be from the Islamic point of view—we should have a radio.

We should have a radio with programs that women should know

about their rights. Men should know—men are ignorant. It is not

just because women are ignorant.

In Afghanistan.

Men are ignorant of the rights of their wives, sisters,

and brothers, as much as they are ignorant of their own rights

within Islam. So we need these, whether you call it propaganda,

whether you call it enlightenment, whatever you call it, whatever

you like. I do not care, as long as we have these programs that will

talk to the nation, talk to the people, to tell them that as a Muslim

how could they live a democratic life and how as a Muslim they

could give opportunity to the women because this is an order from God.

Senator, I did not mean that we should give them

theology education and come to the philosophy of Islam. In Afghanistan

we have Sunni Hanafis and Shia Jafadis and Ismailis. The

Ismailis, as we know, they are open to all sorts of democracy and

modernization and all.

In the fiq, in the jurisprudence the majority of people have in Afghanistan

and the Jafadi jurisprudence, we are very close. We are

not that far away. The translation or interpretation of Koran, there

are very few places that people differ, very few. But those things

that we need inside Afghanistan today to open these three doors

for women—education, education is the first order of God to Prophet,

to read, learn the knowledge of pen, writing. Not Wahabi nor

Shia, Sunni, whoever, could argue that.

They say it because they count on the ignorance of

people and they proved that they could do it so far.

Incidentally, I will tell you that the last debate I had with

Taliban, again on BBC, or maybe Voice of America, he asked me

very politely, with all my religious titles, that, would you disagree

that the honor of a woman should come before education? I said:

It is not up to you or up to me to decide which comes first, which

comes second; I have no courage to talk on God’s word, which says

the first thing comes, before praying, before Ramadhan, before anything.

I said: Would you have the courage to say such a thing? The

poor man was quiet. How could he say that, no, I have a better way

But my classmate was with you.

That is right, Fatima. That is right, Fowziah

Usman. By the way, she was 6 foot 1 and she was a center on my

team, and I will tell you they were hell on wheels, and they learned

how to play basketball from their brothers.

Thank you.

than God has? So he had to be quiet, because they count upon

women’s silence.

So these are the things. When it comes to work, I

would say the wife of the Prophet was working as a teacher, one

of them, cobbler, or whatever; was he doing something bad? Did

the Prophet allow her to do something which was not honorable?

Could they say anything against it? They cannot.

When we come to the question of voting and being elected, Isaiah

was a politician. The Prophet or any of the caliphs, when they took

the power, they had to ask men and women for consent. We have

evidence in the Koran.

So if we could guarantee these three things, I will tell you, Senator,

that upon that I will build a lot.