

Roving Afghanistan Ambassador Sayyid Rahmatullah Hashemi's Speech at The University of Southern California on March 10, 2001

Allah says: "O you who believe! If a rebellious evil person comes to you with a news, verify it, lest you harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful to what you have done." (Qur`an 49:6)

Sayyid Rahmatullah Hashemi is the roving Ambassador from Afghanistan who recently visited the US. He has been active in giving lectures on the real situation regarding the Taliban in Afghanistan throughout Central and Southern California. The following is the transcribed lecture given by Sayyid Rahmatullah Hashemi at the University Of Southern California on March 10, 2001.

Sayyid Rahmatullah Hashemi:

I was just coming from [a meeting with] a group of scholars, and the first thing we started with there was the statues. And the first thing we started with here was also the statues. It's very unfortunate how little we see and how little we know. And it really confuses me, if people really know that little or not. Nobody has seen the problems of Afghanistan; nobody saw their problems before. And the only thing that represents Afghanistan today are the statues.

The problems of Afghanistan are not new. As you know, Afghanistan is called The Crossroads of Asia. We are suffering because of our geo-strategic location. We have suffered in the 18th century, 19th century - and we are still suffering in this century.

We have not attacked the British. We have not attacked the Russians. It was they who attacked us. So the problems in Afghanistan you see are not our creation. They reflect the image of Afghanistan to the world. If you don't like the image in the mirror, do not break the mirror; break your face.

The problems in Afghanistan started in 1979. Afghanistan was a peaceful country and it was doing its own job. 140,000 Russian troops attacked Afghanistan in December 1979, just 21 years ago. They stayed there for a decade, killed one and a half million people, maimed one million more people, and six million out of the eighteen million people migrated because of Russian brutalities. Even today, our children are dying because of the landmines that they planted for us. And nobody knows about this.

During the Russian occupation, on the other side, the American government, the British government, the French, the Chinese, and all the rest supported the counter-revolutionaries called the Mujahideen; only 7 parties in Pakistan and 8 parties in Iran fought the Russian occupation. And after the Russians left, these parties went into Afghanistan. All of them had different ideologies and a lot of weapons. And instead of having a single administration, they fought in Afghanistan.

The destruction that they brought was worse than the destruction the Russians brought. 63,000 people were killed in just the capital, Kabul. Seeing all this chaos and the complete destruction of our country - after the Soviets left, another million people migrated because of the lawlessness that existed amongst Afghanistan's 7 million people.

Seeing this destruction and lawlessness, a group of students called the Taliban - Taliban is the plural word of students in our language; it may be two students in Arabic, but in our language it means students so a group of students started a movement called the Movement of Students. It first started in a village in the southern province of

Afghanistan, called Kandahar. It happened when a war-lord, or a commander abducted two minor girls, raped them. The parents of those girls went to a school and asked the teacher of the school to help them. The teacher of that school, along with his 53 students, with only 16 guns, attacked the base of that commander. After releasing those two girls, they hanged the commander, and many of the commander's people were also hanged.

This story was told everywhere; and this was called the terrorist story of the Taliban, or the Students. BBC quoted this story. Hearing this story, many other students joined this movement and started disarming the rest of the warlords, who were worse than these. I will not prolong this story so far, these same students movement controls 95% of the country; they captured the capital, including the four major cities. And only a bunch of those warlords are remaining in the northern corridor of Afghanistan.

So our achievements are as follows. We are in a government for only five years, and the following things that we have done, and many of you may not know:

- The first thing we have done is reunify the fragmented country. Afghanistan was formerly fragmented into five parts. The first thing we have done is to reunify that country. The United Nations, the United States, everybody was confused as to how to reunify that country, and nobody could do it. First thing we have done is to reunify that country.
- Second thing we have done, which everybody failed to do, was disarming a population. After dealing [with] the war of the Russians, and the Americans, I would say, every Afghan got a Kalashnikov, and even sophisticated weapons such as stinger missiles, and they even got fighter planes and fighter helicopters. So disarming these people was impossible. The United Nations in 1992 passed an appeal asking for 3 billion dollars to re-purchase those arms, to start a process of repurchasing those arms. And suddenly, because of its impracticality, that plan never materialized, and everybody forgot about Afghanistan. So the second thing we have done is to disarm 95% of that country.
- And the third thing that we have done is to establish a single administration under Afghanistan, which did not exist for 10 years.
- And the fourth achievement that we have that is surprising to everybody is that we have eradicated 75% of all worlds Opium cultivation. Afghanistan produced 75% of all worlds Opium. The drug, you know that Opium? The Narcotics business? And last year we issued an edict asking the people to stop growing Opium, and this year, the United Nations Drug Control Program, UNDCP, and their head, [Mr.] Barnard F., proudly announced that there was 0% of Opium cultivation. Not at all. And this was not a good news for UN itself because many of them lost their jobs. In the UNDCP, 700 so called experts were working there and they got their salaries and they never went into Afghanistan. So when we issued this edict, I know that they were not happy. And this year they lost their jobs. And this was our fourth achievement.

- The fifth achievement that we have, but it's a little controversial, some of our friends will not know is the restoration of Human rights. Now, YOU may think that is a violation of Human Rights, but from OUR perspective that is the restoration of Human Rights. Because usually [among] the fundamental rights of a human being is the right to live. Before us, nobody could live peacefully in Afghanistan. So the first thing we have done, begun [to give] to the people is a secure and peaceful life. The second major thing that we have restored is to give them free and fair justice; you don't have to buy justice, unlike here. You will have justice freely. And you have criticized us for violating women's rights; now, who knows what happened before us. Only some symbolic schools, or symbolic posts were given to some women in the ministry, and that was called the restoration of women's rights. I can see some Afghans living here, and they will agree with me, that in the rural areas of Afghanistan, women were used as animals. They were SOLD actually. The first thing we have done is to give the self-determination to women, and it happened not in the history of Afghanistan. Throughout the history of Afghanistan, during all the so-called civilized kings or whatever, they didn't give this right to women, so women were sold! They didn't have the right to select their husbands, or to reject their husbands. First thing we have done is to let them choose their future. And you will know that throughout south Asia, women are killed under the title of honor killings. It happens when a woman's relation is detected with a man, whether or not the relation was sexual, they're both killed. But now this is not happening in our country. And the third thing that happened only in Afghanistan, was women were exchanged as gifts; this was not something religious; this was something cultural. When two tribal tribes were fighting among themselves, then in order to get their tribal issue reconciled, they would exchange women, and then [they] would make, or announce reconciliation. And this has been stopped. If we [had to give] fundamental rights of woman, we had to start from zero; we couldn't jump in the middle. Now you've asked me about the rights of women's education and the rights of women's work. Unlike what is said here, women do work in Afghanistan. You're right that until 1997 I mean, in 1996 when we captured the capitol Kabul, we did ask women to stay home. It didn't mean that we wanted them to stay at home forever, but nobody listened to us. We said that there is no law, and there is no order, and have to stay at home. They were raped before us, everyday. So, after we disarmed the people, and after we brought law and order, and now women are working. You are right that women are not working in the ministry of defense, like here. We don't want our women to be fighter pilot[s], or to be used as objects of decoration for advertisements. But they do work. They work in the Ministry of Health, Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, and so on. So, and we don't have any problem with women's education. We have said that we want education, and we will have education whether or not we are under anybody's pressure, because that is part of our belief. We are ordered to do that. When we say that there should be segregated schools, it does not mean that we don't want our women to be educated. It is true that we are against co-education; but it is not true that we are against women's education. We do have schools even now, but the problem is the resources. We cannot expand these programs. Before, our

government there were numerous curriculums that were going on; there were curriculums which preached the king for the kings, and there were curriculums which preached for the communists, and there were curriculums from all these seven parties [the previously mentioned]. So, the Students were confused as to what to study, and the first we have done today is to unify that curriculum, and that's going on. But we are criticized, and we say that instead of criticism, if you just help us once, that will make a difference. Because criticism will not make a difference. If you criticise from New York, thousands of miles away, we don't care. But if you come there and help us, we do care. Actually there are more girls students studying in the faculty of medical sciences than boys are. This is not me who is saying this, it is the United Nations who has announced this. Recently we reopened the faculty of medical science in all major cities of Afghanistan and in Kandahar, there are more girl students than boys! But they are segregated. And the Swedish committees have also established schools for girls. I know they are not enough, but that's what we can do. So, that is what I say that we have restored. I don't say we are 100% perfect, and nobody will say that they are 100% perfect. We do have shortcomings, and we do need to amend our policies. But we can't do everything over night.

- And the sixth problem, that we are is it sixth or seventh? Seventh I think the seventh problem that we are accused of is Terrorism, or the existence of terrorists in Afghanistan. And for Americans terrorism or terrorist means only bin Laden. Now you will not know that Afghanistan, or bin Laden was in Afghanistan 17 years before even we existed. Bin Laden was in Afghanistan, fought the Soviet Union, and Mr. Ronald Reagan, the president of America in that time, and Dick, Mr. Dick Chaney called such people freedom fighters or the Heroes of Independence, because they were fighting for their cause. So Osama bin Laden was one of those guys who was instigated by such media reports, so in that provocation by these countries to go to Afghanistan and fight the Soviets there. And now when the Soviet Union is fragmented, such people were not needed anymore, and they were transformed into terrorists from heroes to terrorists. So exactly like Mr. Yassir Arafat was transformed from a terrorist to a hero. So we don't know as to what is the definition of Terrorism. We do regret that the terrorists were actually horrific acts and they were terrorist acts. But if they are terrorist acts, what is the difference between those terrorist acts and the attacks on Afghanistan when in 1998 attacks, cruise missile attacks on Afghanistan. Neither of the two were declared and both of them killed civilians. So we are confused as to what is the definition of Terrorism. If it means killing civilians blindly, both of them killed civilians blindly. And the fact is, I'm not going to be offensive or rude about this, I'm going to be frank. And I think it's sometimes honest to be rude. If the United States that it has acted for its defense, lets see. The United States government tried to kill a man without even giving him a fair trial. In 1998, they just sent cruise missiles into Afghanistan and they announced that they were trying to kill Osama bin Laden. We didn't know Osama bin Laden then. I didn't know him; he was just a simple man. So we were all shocked. I was one of those men who was sitting at home at night. I was called for an immediate council meeting and we all were told the United States

have attacked Afghanistan. With 75 cruise missiles and trying to kill one man. And they missed that man; killed 19 other students and never apologized for those killings. So what would you do if you were in our status; if we were to go and send 75 cruise missiles into the United States and say that we were going to kill a man that we thought, not believed, was responsible for our embassy, and we missed that man, and we killed 19 other Americans what would the United States do? An instant declaration of war. But we were polite. We didn't declare war. We had a lot of problems at home; we didn't want further problem[s]. And since then, we are very open-minded on this issue. We have said, that if really this man is involved in the Kenya/Tanzania acts, if anybody can give us proof or evidence about his involvement in these horrific acts, we will punish him. Nobody gave us evidence. We put him on trial for 45 days and nobody gave us any kind of evidence. The fact is that the United States told us they did not believe in our judicial system. We were surprised as to what kind of judicial system they have?! They showed us as to what they are doing to the people they just tried to kill a man without even giving him a fair trial, even if one of us is a criminal here, the police is not going to blow his house, he must go to a court first. So, that was rejected. Our first proposal, despite all these things, was rejected. They said they will not believe in our judicial system, and we must give him to New York. The second proposal that we gave after the rejection of this first proposal we gave was, we are ready to accept an international monitoring group to come into Afghanistan and monitor this man's activities in Afghanistan. So that he does nothing. Even that he has no telecommunications [--]. That proposal was also rejected. And the third proposal we gave, six months ago, was that we were ready, that we were ready to try or accept a third Islamic country's decision, or the trial of [--] in a third Islamic country, with consent of Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan - that was also rejected. So we don't know, as to what is the problem behind. If bin Laden was the only issue, we are still very open minded, and for the fourth time, I'm here, with a letter from my leadership that I'm going to submit to the state department hoping that they will resolve the problem. But I don't think they'll solve the problem. Because we think, and I personally think now that maybe the United States is looking for a Boogy Man always. Remember what Gorbachev said? He said, that he's going to do the worst thing ever to the United States. And everybody thought that he's going to blow the United States with nuclear weapon[s]. But he said, I'm going to remove their enemy. And then he fragmented Soviet Union. And he was right. After he fragmented Soviet Union, a lot of people lost their jobs in the Pentagon, in the CIA, and the FBI, because they were not needed anymore. So we think that maybe these guys are looking for a Boogy Man now. Maybe they want to justify their annual budget, maybe they want to make their citizens feel that they are still needed to defend them.

Afghanistan is not a terrorist state; we cannot even make a needle. How are we going to be a terrorist state? How are we going to be a threat to the world? If the world terrorism is really derived from the word terror, then there are countries making weapons of mass destruction, countries making nuclear weapons, forest deforestation, soil, air, and water pollution they are terrorist states; we are not. We cannot even make a needle; how are

we going to be a threat to the world? So as I said in the beginning, the situation in Afghanistan is not our creation. The situation in Afghanistan reflects the world's image. If you don't like the image in the mirror, do not break the mirror; break your face.

Now, we are under sanctions. And the sanctions have caused a lot of problems, despite that we are going under so many problems, the 23 years of continuous war, the total destruction of our infrastructure, and the problem of refugees, and the problem of land mines in our agricultural lands, all of a sudden the United Nations, with the provocation of Russia, is imposing sanctions on Afghanistan. And the sanctions have been approved; we are under sanctions.

Several hundred children died a month ago, here it is (holds up pamphlet). Seven hundred children died because of malnutrition and the severe cold weather. Nobody even talked about that. Everybody knows about the statues.

For us, we are surprised, that the world is destroying our future with economic sanctions, then they have no right to worry about our past. Everybody is saying that they are destroying their heritage they don't have any right to talk about that. They are destroying the future of our children with economic sanctions, how are they going to justify talking about our past? I know it's not rational and logical to blow the statues for, for retaliation of economic sanctions. But this is how it is. I called, after this announcement, I called my headquarters, and I found out, I was really confused, I asked them, why are they going to blow the statues, and I talked to the head of the council of scholars of people, who had actually decided this, he told me that UNESCO and NGO from Sweden, or from one of these Scandinavian countries Norway, Sweden, one of these they had actually come, with a project of rebuilding the face of these statues, which have worn by rain. So the council of people had told them to spend that money in saving the lives of these children, instead of spending that money to [restore these] statues.

And these guys said that, No, this money is only for the statues. And the people were really pissed off. They said that, If you don't care about our children, we are going to blow those statues.

[Person from the Audience yells, Takbeer!]

[Audience responds, Allahu Akbar!]

I don't say that he's right or wrong, the decision is yours. Think for yourself. If you are in such a problem, what would you do? If your children are dying in front of your eyes, and you are under sanctions, and then the same people who have imposed sanctions and are coming and building statues here? What will you do?

So, I talked to my headquarters today, and they said that the statues have not been blown so far. But the people are so angry. They are really angry, they want to blow them. And there is Kofi Annan going, you know Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of United Nations? He went to [--], to Pakistan, and he said he's going to meet our representative there. This man never bothered to enter, to talk about these children, he never bothered himself to talk about six million refugees, and he never talked about [the] poverty of Afghanistan. He only goes to that region because of these statues.

And the OIC is also, they've also sent a mission to go to Kabul and talk about those statues. So we're really confused. That the world is really caring about the statues, and then they don't care about human beings. I don't say we have to retaliate in blowing the statues; we have not done that. But if we were to destroy those statues, we would have destroyed them three years before now, because we captured those areas those areas three years before now. We didn't want to blow them. And now the situation has come, and it's not our decision. This is the decision of the scholars and the people. And

that is the decision that has been approved by the Supreme Court. We cannot reject this decision.

So these guys are there, the OIC and some, even I think some ministers from different countries are there to save the lives of these statues. I think they will not be blown because of the concerns of these people. But it is really, really ridiculous. These people do not care about children, about people who are dying there, about the foreign interference that still exists, they only care about the statues; their picnic site. Maybe they'll have a good picnic site there, seeing those statues. They don't care about our heritage, I'm sure. If they were to care about our past, they wouldn't destroy our future.

And I'm sure these sanctions which are imposed on our government will never change us, because for us, our ideology is everything. To try to change our ideology with economic sanctions will never work. It may work in the United States, where the economy is everything, but for us, our ideology is everything.

And we believe that it is better to die for something than to live for nothing.

We are still open-minded. We are still, we have still opened our doors for negotiations, but our offices are closed everywhere, our office was closed in New York a week ago. They are trying to shut our offices in other countries, trying to isolate us, and they don't know that isolation is counter-productive. Because they don't have experts; the only experts they have are those people who speak English. They don't even speak the language. Those experts who are advising the sanctions, or the sanction committee have not even been to Afghanistan. And they are setting benchmarks for us to achieve.

I'm prolonging this speech, I'm sorry, because I have been repeating it everywhere, so I may have left some thing in it, and I will let you ask me questions.

[Applause from Audience]

Important Note: What follows are some of the answers to some of the questions that were asked during the Question and Answer session. Most of the questions were not included due to the poor recording. Apologies for the inconvenience.

_ [A questioner asks about the statement he heard on the radio from the Afghan former minister (Mutawakkil) confirming that the statues have been destroyed, and further adds, Does that mean the statues of Hindus and Sikhs will also be destroyed? He further asked that since the destruction of the statues was done in retaliation. Was it really saving the children? [asked in a provocative manner]

Thank you very much and unfortunately again, the first question is the statues. So the statues as I told you, have not been destroyed so far. And I have contacted my headquarters there, and if they were destroyed, then people would not bother going there; as I told you Kofi Annan is there, OIC is there, and our foreign minister is there. And for us, as he [the questioner] said that Mutawakkil has said that [that the statues have been destroyed], I don't think he has said that they are destroyed. He said that [that the statues have not been destroyed]. And I don't reject this. They raised an edict which says these [the statues] should be blown. And we are not against Buddhists; absolutely wrong. We are not against any religion. There are Hindus living in Afghanistan; there are different religions. There is one man who is a Jew living in Afghanistan.

[Audience laughs]

So we are not against any religion. And there is no Buddhist in Afghanistan, this I can say. In our religion, if anything, you can leave anything until it is not harmful to you. These Buddhas were not harmful to us, so far. But now when the money is going to Buddhas reconstruction, and the children are dying next door, we think it's harmful now.

Not we think, the people think. And I told you that this decision is taken by the council of scholars and the council of people. And has been approved by the Supreme Court. And the media is saying everywhere that it is an edict by our leadership. Have you ever seen our leadership on TV? Have you ever seen or heard him (Mullah Umar) on international radio? He has never been on radio, so it's absolutely wrong that we issued an edict. I do agree that there is an edict, but by the council of people and the scholars, and has been approved by the Supreme Court, but has not been implemented so far. Is it enough? You know, really, I am asked so much about these statues that I have a headache now. If I go back to Afghanistan, I will blow them.

[Audience laughs]

_ [Questioner asks about the infighting between Mujahideens now. He asks, in the past we knew that there was one common enemy (the Russians) and it was easy to support the Mujahideen but now it's the groups of Mujahideens fighting between each other. How do you explain this?]

They [the different Mujahideen groups] killed so many people, and there were so many problem[s]. And that's why we started our movement. It's all in these people. They didn't fight for Shari ah, or they didn't fight for Afghanistan, they only fought for their future post in power. So we, as I told you that, we finished that. And only now, we have one opposition headed by Ahmed Shah Masood. And we don't have much problems with him. We had talks with his representative in Ashkabad in Ramadhaan this year, and I was there. So, we say that he failed in bringing about a constitution, a unified government; he could not even unify the capitol, Kabul. So we did all these things. So we asked him, despite that he controls nothing, except 5% in the mountains, and we have said we are still open-minded. We agree that he should have a post, because he has fought the Russians. And in `98, we agreed on a joint government; actually, I was also there, so we agreed in giving them three ministries and accepting their judicial system merging with our judicial system, and giving them three or four district or provincial governors or something like that. And they agreed on that. Our, on our part, we asked them to give us their weapons, because the problem in Afghanistan is not political differences. The problem in Afghanistan is the weapons. Everybody has had weapons, and now if they are fighting us, it is not because of our very much ideological differences; it's because of weapons. There were a lot of weapons before, and you know, the Afghans will know that so many times they tried to have one government and then after a week or so, they fought, because all of them got different defense ministries, and they would fight. So now we have said that the problems in Afghanistan is not the political problem; it is the arms which exist. We are, we will accept them to be in our government if he accepts to give his arms to the Ministers of Defense. We have no problem however.

_ [A questioner asked, As Salaamu `Alaykum wa Rahmatullaahi wa Barakaatuh. Brother, Afghanistan is now supposed to be a Muslim country, Insha Allah. And these statues are just like the statues in Makkah, when Rasoolillah (saws) came to Makkah, and it was the very first thing that he did was to destroy the statues. What is taking us so long? Why aren't they destroyed already?]

[Audience laughs, some say Takbeer]

I don't know what to say. We don't have any Buddhists as I told you; we have to look at the problems of the Muslim minorities in some countries. So we do not want to create problems for them, that's why we are still waiting, and we hope that we will resolve this problem.

_ [A written question read, What is your opinion about killing the Iranian officers in Heraat in 1998?]

So, there is this story about seven nine, nine Iranians, one of them was a journalist, and the rest of them were called diplomats. It happened in `98 when we were capturing a city in the north of Afghanistan called Mazar-e-Shareef when we were, we announced before our campaign in liberating that city, we announced that all diplomats of organizations, including the UN, the diplomatic missions, and NGOs to evacuate because of the possible fighting that may happen in the city too. So, all of them evacuated, the United Nations, the NGOs, and even those people who actually bombed them, they also evacuated, so the only people who remained there was some seven, or eight, night Iranians, who were actually not diplomats, who were actually military advisors to their puppets in Afghanistan. So, and we didn't kill them in diplomatic mission; they were killed on their way to Bamiyan; Bamiyan is another city in central Afghanistan, so they were and we didn't want to kill them; they just died because of the shelling that happened. And we issued an edict, and we declared that we were sorry for what happened. And now the Iranian government has also sent their mission, and when I was coming there, three of their villages were in Afghanistan; they reopened their consulate here and I think they have re-thought their policies now and maybe they will have a new chapter of friendship with us and I hope it will happen.

_ [Question asked about how people, especially Muslims, need to be educated about the situation in Afghanistan. He went on further to ask about whether or not he would be under a physical threat if he were to shave his beard and walk into Afghanistan, or if a sister would be under a physical threat if a sister were to wear Hijab according to the Islamic standards, not wearing Burqah.]

You say that all the Muslims, or all the people, must be educated on the situation in Afghanistan. And now I am thinking that first they must be de-educated to try to understand what we are saying. There are not [--], they are really trying how to approach, and you are right, and I agree that you must have Public Relations, in teaching people, or at least, letting them know what we say. But as I told you that we have other priorities.

Our priority is to save the children. Our priority is to de-mine our country. Our priority is to reunify our country. Our priority is to stop the foreign interference. Our priority is to fight the [--] that is already operating in our country.

So for us to talk about Public Relations, it is important, but it cannot what would you do if you were in this status? And it is not easy to do Public Relations. You have to spend a lot of money.

I will tell you a story of CNN. CNN was in Afghanistan interviewing bin Laden, in `98. You have to be careful in listening to this. I was there, and they asked bin Laden as to what was the thinking about the killing of civilians in Iraq. After three hours of formal conversation, and the camera was rolling. He said, that if all American citizens and if all British citizens are willing, or supporting, to kill all Iraqi civilians, then all American citizens and all British citizens deserve the same thing or to be killed.

CNN cut everything.

Three-hour conversation was not there, only thing they put was and it was not complete, the only clause that they said was, the independent clause of what he said, they said that, all American and British citizens must be killed. This is what came on the air. But he didn't mean this.

And I know that all Americans do not support the killing [of] civilians there. Not even a quarter of that. That was impossible. But now what they taught their people was that bin Laden is saying that all American civilians must be killed. That is the story of media, and the media here is very irresponsible. They are commercialized, and they'll do anything

for selling advertisements.

He [the questioner] talked about the beard and the veil. First of all, for all non-Afghans, this rule does not apply. So there are many non-Afghans who are working there; there are actually Americans who are working there in the UN, there are many people from different parts of the world. And they do whatever [--], they don't care. And we don't have a law for them.

But Afghanistan is a country that has gone through 23 years of war, and there is still war, and the military is mixed with the people. Then you must have some sort of strict law, in order to insure security and peace in Afghanistan. So, maybe it is ridiculous for you that we ask people to grow beards, but this is what, it is in Afghanistan, and the Afghans do leave beard, whether or not you tell them. And it's something natural.

And regarding the veil, or the Burqas, or the Islamic dress code, that is something that exists in Afghanistan for centuries. And it does exist in Iran, it does exist in Saudi Arabia, it exists in many Islamic countries. It has nothing to do only with Afghanistan. And it does even exist here.

So you can't force people not to have Burqas, and we do have that constitution that at this time, women should cover up. For us because our priority is that they should be safe.

_ [Questioner asks about what Afghans living in the US can do for Afghanistan. She also gives a brief account of her experience in Afghanistan, when she travelled there recently, and gave proof that schools existed there, and that the situation there is much better, more peaceful than it was six years ago. She travelled alone, all over the country.]

Thank you very much. I'm very happy that at least I found a proof!

[Audience laughs]

I'm thankful to you [for] what you say, and I really appreciate the emotions you have for your country. I myself, I'm 24, and serving my country. I could play football now, and I could even play here, and I could stay in the United States, but I don't do any of those things - I serve my country. So I agree that whatever, all those things that exist in Afghanistan, maybe there are many things that we don't want, but they do exist. We are not a sponsor for those things. They existed for two decade[s].

So the best thing to do for Afghanistan is to have an association of Afghans to raise funds, and the best thing I would say [is to] educate people. Instead of criticism, they can go there and open a school. They can open a school for girls, for boys. But that would be the best thing.

Unfortunately some of our Afghans are sitting in their air-conditioning rooms here, play their TVs, and when they have nothing to do. Then they criticize us because we can't make Europe for them.

We can do it, we have a lot of problems, but the first thing they should do is to stop harming us. They have to come and help us, in all the sectors. We do need all the Afghans from here. If they really criticize our policies, they should go there and criticize our policies, not from here. So the best thing for you is for you people to raise funds, do NOT give it to us, one of you should gone there, help the people.

_ [Questioner: Do you respect our right to tell you that if you didn't believe in PR, you wouldn't be here right now. Actually I'd like to ask you, does your version of

Islam preach hate? I don't know, I'm asking you; do you believe in the religion of hate? Because I was very disgusted when that lady got up and asked you why don't you blow those idols, because that boy right there (points to a boy in the audience) laughed.

MSA Representative interrupts, Please ask your question.

Questioner, I'm asking you, are you preaching hate?

MSA Representative, Is that your question?

Questioner, That is the question. **[He continues to argue.]**

Enough? I don't know what to say but you only expressed your emotions. Islam means Peace. First you have to understand. And a peaceful religion will never preach for Hate. And we do not preach for Hate. And you said that if we didn't believe in Public Relations, I wouldn't be here. It's my first time here, and I've waited for an American Visa for a long time, and I'm not used to doing these things.

I brought a letter from my leadership that I explained before that I will be submitting to the leader of the administration here, and hoping that they will re-think their policies. So I do believe that, I say that we must believe in Public Relations because they are very important. But I say that Public Relations needs a lot resources, and at this time we have resources for the [--] for the plight of our people.

[Questioner: I actually agree with you about the western media; they are very biased [--], but looking at people like him (the young boy who laughed) at such a young age[--].]

[Small dispute in the Audience]

[Father of young boy, He is my son, ok, and you have come here to accuse him..[-].]

MSA Representatives calm both parties and rest of Audience, and apologizes to audience.]

_ [Questioner asks about women being required to have a male escort whenever they go out. She also questions whether or not if she were to go into Afghanistan wearing what she was now (a jilbab and hijab) would she be under any physical threat.]

You [the questioner] asked me whether a woman was allowed to go without a male escort. I'm here, and my wife is shopping in Kandahar now. So they don't have to be escorted, this is absolutely wrong. Yes, they were, in those cities that we captured first, because that was for their safety. Now, they don't have to. And I don't have any problem with whatever you wear, and women do wear the same thing that you do wear, and they don't have any problems. And I say that those cities, which are close to the frontline and there is military operations going on close, there are thousands of military soldiers of ours, we do ask women to avoid the social areas. Now you're not understanding what I mean, but some of our friends here do understand. In a country that is in a war, the military is mixed with the people, and there are certain limitations. So I can't go beyond that, and I say that women do not have to be escorted.

_ [Questioner asks What is Afghanistan's priority in regards to establishing an Islamic state for all Muslims, not just for Afghans?]

He'd like to destroy us.

[Audience laughs]

We have our first headache in Afghanistan, and that's a big headache. We have a full-time job there. If we were worked 24 hours a day, we will hardly ever be able to reconstruct an [--] Islamic system in our own country. And we have no intention of going beyond our borders, and neither we can. So, all these people who exist in other countries, or their policies, they have nothing to do with us. We are only concerned about Afghanistan. And please do not try to make assumptions. Ask me questions. I was asked in, I was in Bay Area just yesterday, a journalist asked me, Why do you hate women? And I told him, Why do you beat your wife? And he said, I don't beat my wife. I said, I don't hate women.

[Audience laughs]

So you have to ask me questions. You just make assumptions. You didn't ask me whether a woman must be escorted or not - this is an easy question. But if you say, Why are you doing this, Why are you doing... We're not doing it.

_ [Questioner: My country (Iran) is suffering from drug-trafficking from Afghanistan; you said that you [--] drugs from your area, but how can you explain this contradiction? You have said that you cannot even make a needle, what does it mean?]

I would like to answer this question first and then I will not forget. I said Afghanistan produced 75% of all world's Opium, 75% of all the world's. And we eradicated it last year. And this was announced not just by United Nations - who rejects this? All of them know it was announced by Iranian government. I don't say we eradicated five years ago - [it was] this year. United Nations announced..

[Questioner: You mean 2001? So that's two months ago? But our country is still suffering from that?! continues to argue]

Please, please try to hear what I'm saying.

[Questioner continues to talk and argue, MSA representatives try to calm him down.]

[Questioner goes on, I know, but this is the question I wanted to ask! ...]

My brother, listen to me. You say that your country is still suffering from Opium from Afghanistan. I do not say that we eradicated it five years ago. This year, the United Nations Drug Control Program, announced that there was 0% Opium cultivation; Iran, too, admitted that. So if you don't know that, your problem. New York Times announced this; it was in a New York Times editorial. So if you don't know this, then it's your problem. I do admit that there are still some piles of Opium that exists from the years before the last cultivation that may [have been sent] to your country. But we will admit, that we have, and I told you that, there are missions for us, across Afghanistan, to Iran, to our country, and they are trying to eradicate the already existing Opium; it was not produced this year; it was produced the year before last.

_ [Questioner asks whether or not they have asked for a loan from the World Bank or BMF]

Not yet. We have not asked BMF neither the World Bank to help us. But if they do help us, we will not reject it. So we are not asking because we are not being recognized so

we can't ask them for loans.

_ [Questioner is a Political Scientist and is asking whether or not Bureaucrats and Technocrats are needed in Afghanistan because, according to him, the Taliban are not smart enough nor suitable to be governing Afghanistan.]

We never say that we are perfect. The question is, Who could do more than we do? These seven parties? The Communists? Or the King? Who did this? The things that we have done? Who could do more than that? It's very easy to say, to criticize from here, Do this, do this, do that.. But it's very difficult to do that. You said that the Taliban are not Bureaucrats and Technocrats, and we're not going to change that. I'm sorry to say, you know what the old king of Afghanistan, he was 88 years old, and he spent seven years living in Rome, he had bought an island there, and now this man wants to come back to Afghanistan and head the government. The old, rotten knucklehead.

[Audience laughs]

So, we were very surprised as to what did he do in 43 years of his government? He didn't do anything. He only knew how to decorate his palace. I'm sorry to say this. And now the same man, after 43 years - Sorry, 27 years, is willing to go back and govern; he cannot even take a flight back to Afghanistan. He's too weak. So how's he going to?

We do need professionals. We don't say that we are perfect. And I repeat it again, we cannot come here, and ask everybody to come help us. We have asked so many times. Anybody willing to help their country, come and help. And many people come and ask me, Well, how do we go? And we say, How did you come here?!

[Audience laughs]

And yeah, go there if women can go there, what is the problem? But if you ask us to give you the government, then that's difficult. So I agree with you that we need Technocrats, but we don't need politicians.

This ends the transcribed version of the lecture by Sayyid Rahmatullah Hashemi.

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