



**Women's Foreign Policy Group**  
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*A Status Report on the Refugee Situation in Kyrgyzstan*

**Patricia Ellis:** Good evening and welcome. I am Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, which promotes women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day. We honored Melanne Vermeer just a few weeks ago. We've done Celebrations of Women Diplomats events. We have an Author Series event on the Middle East. We have an Embassy Series. We have a lot of exciting things coming up this fall. So, if you're not a member, you should probably become one. We have an event at the Indian Embassy coming up in September. We're very active and we also do mentoring of the next generation and we're very committed to that. We're very excited about today's program because this is an extremely timely issue and we have two people who are going to give us a first hand report. They were just in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—they'll give you the details—but from July 2<sup>nd</sup> to July 16<sup>th</sup>, in Bishkek, Osh, and Uzbekistan. You are all aware of the violence and the many problems on the ground and that's what we will be hearing about.

Dawn Calabia, my good friend, is an officer of the Board of the Women's Foreign Policy Group and is a Senior Advisor at Refugees International. Her colleague, Maureen Lynch, is a Senior Advocate on Stateless Initiatives. Before I tell you a little bit more about them, I just wanted to recognize one of the women diplomats here with us today, the Deputy Chief of Mission from the Embassy of Morocco. Thank you. It's so nice to see you. I think it's the first time you've been at one of our events. We're extremely pleased.

Let me just tell you a little bit more about Dawn and Maureen. Dawn has had more than 20 years of experience working on refugee issues, foreign policy analysis, human rights and advocacy. She handled governmental/non-governmental relations for the US in the Caribbean for UNHCR. She was director of Refugee Policy and International Affairs for the US Catholic Conference. She worked on the Hill. She was one of the founders of the Women's Refugee Commission. Most significantly, she's led numerous fact-finding missions on refugees, humanitarian aid and development issues, most recently in Kyrgyzstan. Maureen Lynch has conducted assessment missions to more than 20 countries since 1999, including Azerbaijan, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Cote d'Ivoire, the Palestinian Territories, and Zimbabwe. She writes and speaks a lot on stateless issues. She now is very much focused on raising awareness about the 11 million stateless persons

around the world. She was on a previous mission on Kyrgyzstan in 2007. Please join me in welcoming Dawn Calabria and Maureen Lynch. Thank you so much. [*Applause.*]

**Dawn Calabria:** Maureen's going to start telling you about how our first trip to Kyrgyzstan in 2007 went when some of you were in the country.

**Dr. Maureen Lynch:** Let me briefly introduce Refugees International as an organization. We're about 30 years old. Probably the most important thing that you might want to be familiar with about the organization is that we're not operational; we're fully an advocacy organization. So our staff travels from the Washington office to places around the world, typically in emergency situations. We are also an independent organization without support from the US government or the United Nations. So in that context, most of our work is in emergency situations, but in the context of stateless persons—which is typically the work that I do—back in 2007, we made a first visit to Central Asia on behalf of the organization to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, just to have a look, just to get a feel for the scope of the problem of statelessness in the two countries, which is of course a little bit of a difficult thing to do. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, of course, there is that border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which is where the largest number of stateless people are found. The estimated numbers range anywhere from in the 40,000 to the 100,000 figures. No one knows for sure. Some of the surveys that have come out recently with the support of UNHCR indicate that that number is about 40,000. So that was our original introduction to the area. And, of course, seeing it at that time, everything looked as any community would. It seemed fairly quiet. Communities talked about the cross-border brides, and intermarried families, and movement back and forth across the border, and that things sometimes are tense in the Ferghana Valley, but nothing really more than that. That's kind of Refugees International's introduction and why when the situation happened this past June, we were all put on alert again that we should probably revisit and see what happened. With that I'll leave it, and Dawn will pick up on the 2010 edition of what happened.

**Ms. Calabria:** Many people in the United States obviously have not followed developments in Central Asia—no surprise. It's an area where geography and ethnicity and obviously the policies of Stalin and the moving of ethnic groups around in the former Soviet Union had a tremendous impact. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan share a big portion of the Ferghana Valley. Why is that important? Because it's the most fertile area in the country. It's also the only flat land to speak of in Kyrgyzstan, which is a country of 5.4 million people. 70% are Kyrgyz, 15% are ethnic Uzbek, and about 9% are Russians, obviously from mother Russia. And then there is an assortment of other minority populations, Uighurs, various other Chinese groups, Tartars, and Tajiks. Kyrgyzstan—when it was established in 1991 as an independent country—seemed to be leaning more towards the West. It tried to assert its independence from the former Soviet Union. After the adoption of its first constitution in 1993, it then quickly went about putting in laws on refugees and migrations, which are some of the most progressive in the region. It became a party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on Refugees.

In 2005, there was an uprising in Uzbekistan and Andijan, with the unhappiness with the government. The government there fired on a group of citizens, and thousands of people fled to the border and crossed from Andijan into Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan accepted them as refugees, invited the UNHCR to continue to work with them and has permitted those who wish to stay in

the country on a permanent basis. Many have migrated outside, some have resettled as refugees. Some have gone back to Uzbekistan because it's very difficult to leave your home, your country, your language, your property, and your family. So Kyrgyzstan has progressive refugee and migration legislation. As Maureen said, we're starting to address the issue of statelessness—people who, because of the change in laws and the break up of the Soviet Union and the fact that you had to be a resident in Russia at the time to get Russian citizenship, where you had to be a resident in Kyrgyzstan for so many years at the time you applied for citizenship, fell through those cracks. You didn't have the right documents, they weren't sure if they were going to stay in the country. So they wound up with a stateless population. And of course, there was intermarriage between Uzbeks on both sides of the border.

So the 15% of the population that is Uzbek live primarily in the south of the country. The majority of its population is Kyrgyz. The Uzbek population is heavily in the South. In the town of Osh, it's 50/50, 47% Kyrgyz, 47% Uzbek and the rest, an assortment of Uighurs, Russians, and others. The Uzbek community is viewed with suspicion in Kyrgyzstan, in part because of the neighboring country next door called Uzbekistan. The two countries do not have the greatest of all relations. In fact, at different points in time, they've imposed economic sanctions and closed their borders to each other. When the terrible events of June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>—that first night of terror—took place, starting in Osh, it seems to have started in a fight downtown outside a casino where there was a mob of Uzbek and Kyrgyz young people. Some of the things that happened were elements of planned activities that don't seem to have arrived spontaneously, resulting in what you could almost call a pogrom that went on for three nights until the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. By the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of June, over 150,000 people had massed at the Uzbek border—men, women, children fleeing attacks. A number of Kyrgyz families had been attacked, their homes burned—people killed, murdered, and abducted. And on the Uzbek side as well. The death toll officially is around 400 at this particular point in time, though the President, Roza Otunbayeva, has said that the death toll could be 2,000 or more. Why? It's difficult because this is a pretty Muslim country. Burial is within 24 hours of death. And a lot of people were buried informally and very quickly without death certificates. It's something that is haunting the survivors of the violence because to inherit property, to prove your relationship, you have to have documents. If over 2,000 homes and businesses have been torched, you know those documents are missing.

So the people massed up on the border. The President of Uzbekistan, for a while, closed the border, but then the outcry in his own country was extremely high. And tensions: we heard Uzbek citizens talking to us about the military police, commentators, people talking on the street—they had to do something. Some people wanted to go to war with Kyrgyzstan. Cooler heads prevailed and instead, the government decided to open the borders. They were expecting about 30,000 to 40,000 people to show up when they opened the borders on the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup>. There are six crossings at Jalalabad and six at Osh. Within three hours, 33,000 people had entered the country and within 24 hours, almost 100,000 people. To control the flow, Uzbekistan decided that it would admit only vulnerable populations. That usually means women and children, the elderly, the disabled, and the wounded. Obviously, in some circumstances, if you pay a certain amount of money you can go any place in the world. And the other thing is, when you see the pictures of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border, there are parts of it that are not guarded, are not fenced. Obviously, in the major cities, at the main crossing points, there are regular security installations. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks told us about trying to approach, in Osh, the

border crossing to go into Uzbekistan. They had documents. But they were fired on by their own military and border security. At least that's what they say. If you saw a couple hundred thousand people running towards your post, you might get frightened. So, who knows what prompted that. But there was a great deal of suspicion as a result.

In addition, the pattern of violence that you see depicted in the newspapers is basically an armed personnel carrier or a tank in some places in the country. Not many civilians drive tanks, from my experience. Remember Mike Dukakis's problem in Massachusetts; he got into a tank, for those of you who are old enough. So these tanks and armed personnel carriers or military trucks were used to break open the gates in Uzbek communities, and also in some places in the Kyrgyz community, people tend to live in a compound. It's a little bit like Central America, or places in Asia where houses are built on the perimeter of the property. The center is a garden, with fruit trees, often vineyards. Multiple families often live on the same property. The average family size in Osh is about 7.5 people. The official toll is about 1,800 houses were burned. In some cases, 20 or 30 people lived in those housing complexes. They fled to the border. When the border was opened, the women and children entered the country. Uzbekistan was overwhelmed by the response. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, they invited in the international community. Some UN agencies said they had never gotten a friendly call from the government before. And they got a friendly call to go to the airport and bring their official delegations because they were going down to Andijan and Angren to see the places where the refugees were being housed. The government did a very good job from everything that we heard and even the stories from the refugees. They had hot meals, they had shelter, they had tents, they had blankets, and they had medical care. They called up the education department and the emergency response division. In summer, teachers were on holiday. They all came in and they brought the school counselors and school psychologists from all over the country to this area. And obviously, the majority of the refugees spoke Uzbek, so there was not a communication problem. It made me think a little bit about Katrina and how we dealt with the people who were displaced. On the other hand, nobody kept them out of places for a couple of days and made them mass at the border.

The tensions and fear continue to persist in Kyrgyzstan and people continue to try to enter Uzbekistan. By the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, the Uzbek authorities were very concerned and had already started conversations with the new interim government in Kyrgyzstan headed by Roza Otunbayeva—the first woman president of a Central Asian country—who was formerly Ambassador to the United States. Some of you might know her. She was Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister.

In April, Kyrgyzstan had its second popular revolution that threw out a sitting president. The first was the Tulip Revolution in 2003 and the one in 2010 in April. At that time there was violence, many people were killed and several hundred people were wounded, some of which took place in Osh and Jalalabad. The Uzbek senior leadership in many cases supported the change in government. The Russians had run a lot of publicity on Russian TV and in Russian news talking about the corruption of President Bakiyev. So public opinion turned against him, there were demonstrations, and that's when he fled the country.

As Uzbekistan was talking to the Kyrgyz government, it encouraged Kyrgyzstan to send officials to the refugee camps—at that point, they had several hundred places, the largest was about 6,000

people—to come and talk to them and to promise them that they could return. The officials came and they told the refugees that they were welcome to come back; that the situation was stable at home; that their property was there if they went back; that the country desperately needed them to vote for the new constitution. If they failed to vote, they would be voting against peace and prosperity for the country. In addition, since the families were separated—there were very few husbands and very few male children accompanying the women—most of them decided to go back voluntarily. According to the UN and ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross], most of the returns were voluntary, although there was a lot of pressure and there were a lot of rumors. The Uzbek officials who were operating the camps were very careful to make it clear that people had to go home, that the agreement was reached, that it was time to go, and that the government had promised in Kyrgyzstan that everybody could go back, whether or not they had documents—a big issue when you’re crossing an international boundary. So by the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 13 days after the border was opened, most of the refugees had returned. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan admitted that about 500 people were still getting medical care. Many of those cases have since been taken back across the border to Kyrgyzstan.

However, we know that in many refugee situations, some people always stay behind. In the case of Uzbekistan, initially when refugees entered the country, if they said, “I have a relative, I have a friend,” they were permitted to go to the friend or the relative. That made it easier for the government. And under Uzbek law, if you go within three days of entering the country to a police station with your relatives and say, “I want to stay and visit my relatives,” you can get permission to stay for up to six months. It’s a very discretionary kind of thing. The local police play a role in deciding how long you can stay. Thanks to Maureen’s persistence, as we met with human rights groups in Uzbekistan, we were told by drivers, by taxi cab people, by kids in internet cafes, “We all know about the refugees.” Some of them had visited the camps. Some of them had relatives who were hosting Kyrgyz Uzbek refugees in their homes. They all knew that officially the government had said that the refugee problem was over, but they also worried about if their Uzbek friends were going to be able to stay in the country. The country doesn’t have a refugee law and the country doesn’t have an active presence of UNHCR on its territory, though it did permit them to enter when they thought they were going to have a long-term refugee crisis. UNHCR is now trying to work out an arrangement that they could have some sort of presence in the country. For the people who are hiding in Uzbekistan, the fear is that they could be deported tomorrow if they are asked for identity documents, which clearly state that they are indeed Kyrgyz citizens. It’s up to any government to decide who can stay on their territory, though under international law and customary international law, someone who flees persecution—and the Uzbeks can make a very credible case for persecution—should have a right to stay on your territory unless they present some sort of a threat to your national security. We believe most of the Uzbek refugees from Kyrgyzstan present no threat to the government of Uzbekistan and we hope they will continue to open their borders to some of these people and to permit those who are on the territory to stay there.

Meanwhile, back in Kyrgyzstan, when the refugees returned, the government was taking steps to control the situation. It did send some additional security elements to the South, police and military. But one of the problems in Kyrgyzstan is that there are an increasing number of the militias. So the mayor of Osh has his sports club with young men who practice arms and maneuvers and stay in very good shape. And the political parties that exist in Kyrgyzstan have

increasingly developed defense forces, vigilantes in some cases. It's a worrying trend. The new constitution that the refugees came back to vote for: 50% of those eligible to vote voted in Osh, which is a substantial turnout in any country. In the US, it would be a very good turnout. In the rest of the country, turnout was about 80%. Ninety percent of the people voted for the new constitution, which calls for elections for Parliament that would sit by the end of October, October 27<sup>th</sup>. The US and the UN have been very interested in trying to help develop political institutions in the country, to help civil society develop, to try to make some improvements in the economic situation in the country. A substantial proportion of Kyrgyzstan's males leave the country to work in Russia and in other countries—Kazakhstan, with the oil and gas reserves. The depressed economic conditions in the world have meant that they are fewer remittances. Many people have come back from those countries.

Now unfortunately the trend is get out of Kyrgyzstan any way you can. A friend told us yesterday, there's almost a three month backlog to get on a flight to go from Osh to Bishkek. It's a two hour flight. There are six flights a day, or four flights a day. It's a little hard to find the schedule sometimes. That was one of the most challenging things in the region. When do flights go, when do they go to Almaty, when do they go to Bishkek, when do they go to Tashkent? You have to work really hard to find out, but you can't. Right now, you can't get on a flight. Why? Because people are trying to get out of the country, not just Uzbeks, but some young Kyrgyz as well, feeling that this country is going down the road to ruin. "Let's get out of here while we can." Particularly for many Uzbeks, a feeling that they have no place left in their own country. We were there eight days after the people came back. Most of them were suffering from post traumatic stress disorder and shock. Farmers who were afraid to cross the road, the equivalent of going two blocks to get to their fields, saying, "I know I should go out. The harvest is ripe. I know I should go to the fields, but I can't. I sent my kids away. My kids are staying with my wife's sister someplace else in the country. I know I should go to the fields. But why should I? They burned my house. I have nothing left. They could come tomorrow and kill me. Why should I worry about my crops if they're going to kill me and my wife? Why are you telling me this? We're one country. We're all Sunnis, we're all Muslims. My family has been in this part of the country for 200 years. Why did this happen?"

And that's the big question, why did it happen? The trouble is that when violence starts, it's very hard to stop it. When there's a feeling that there's impunity if you do something to an Uzbek family, that's pretty bad. Since the troubles, the government has started severe investigations, looking for leaders in the Uzbek community. Unfortunately, the arrests and the detentions have fallen very heavily on the Uzbek community, the community that suffered the most in the damages and deaths department. One of the Uzbek men we interviewed said, "Look. If you believe what you see on Kyrgyz television, only Kyrgyz died, only Kyrgyz were burned, only Kyrgyz suffered in this." From what I know, and we don't have any statistics—the government doesn't release them and the government hasn't described where the damage is—but if you look at the satellite photographs, which all the NGOs have in the UN offices, you can see that primarily Uzbek neighborhoods were burned. And conveniently, in downtown Osh, the pattern of destruction matches an urban renewal plan the mayor put out last fall that would take down private houses in downtown areas—small businesses, small hotels—and replace them with high-rise buildings, sports centers, and the other things that a modern city should have, according to the mayor. He's even said, "Well now that all these properties were unfortunately destroyed,

maybe we should just bulldoze them and start construction of high rise apartment buildings downtown.” We asked about the question of private property rights—the country has a tradition of private property. He said, “That’d have to be taken into account, but the government has rights too.” And this is a country not long with a representative form of government. This is its third constitution. And I think it will be its sixth election.

**Ms. Ellis:** Does he have presidential aspiration? The mayor?

**Ms. Calabria:** Everybody has presidential aspirations. There was just a demonstration this morning—Pat was kind enough to send me the feed from Radio Free Europe, which follows this part of the world pretty closely. The new constitution forbids political parties formed on ethnic lines, which most of us would think is a pretty good thing. The opposition is now controlling the government. However, if you look at the heads of the offices and departments, they are pretty much the same people who have been in the government. They’re sort of the nomenklatura, the people who have been there for a long time, recycled. Though some of them are now resigning so that they can run for parliamentary elections. It’s not clear the date of the election, but people are jockeying for future positions.

One of the things that is interesting, if you go to Osh, and you try to talk to people and particularly, when you’re looking for some of the leaders of the community: most of them were in hiding, because the government was rounding them up and arresting them. They thought that there was a price on their head. There are not formal Uzbek parliamentarians. There are not very many Uzbeks who’ve been active in government, despite the fact that they’re 15% of the population—one point of contention for Uzbeks. We talked to a 91 year old grandmother, sitting on a rock, really dispirited. She said, “I have three sons. They had three houses. We had a really nice life. And now we’re living in tents.” I said, “What do you think you should do for the future?” She replied, “First of all, we should be allowed to rebuild our houses, wherever our houses were. Secondly, we have to figure out a way to work together. Thirdly, you must end ethnic discrimination—discrimination against Uzbeks in our country.” I said, “What does that mean to you?” She said, “Jobs. Jobs. That’s what it means.” It was a uniform message that we heard almost everywhere.

With the Kyrgyz community, the concerns and the fears—again because they feel that there’s no real hard information. Kyrgyzstan is a country that has communication because of cell phones. It has a very high percentage of people with cell phones. Something that they told us in Uzbekistan is that people were making payments on the Kyrgyz side of the border so that their wives could continue cell phone communication with them. The Uzbek government did not take away cell phones. Neither government shut down cell phone communications, which is extraordinary. One of the things we do when we go to emergency situations is that we trot along satellite phones. We didn’t have to use them because the cell phone communication worked just fine. But it also meant that rumors spread really quickly. “There’s somebody coming.” “There was a shot last night.” “The Kyrgyz are marching in the streets again.” Or, “The Uzbeks are marching in the streets.” Probably not true, but people hearing noise in the night, not knowing what it was, shots fired, seeing people getting picked up on the streets, disappearing. Uzbeks unable to go to the police station to make a complaint because they won’t take their complaints. Kyrgyz attorneys

trying to go to court to file cases and not being permitted to do so or being substantially harassed from doing so. Formal complaints in this situation are very small.

Uzbeks are very concerned that this is their country, they want to stay. By the same token, they feel that the future for their children is very bad. So those that can are trying to go back to Russia where they worked before, even though they say life in Russia is very hard. “But it’s a place we can go without a visa.” When we interviewed people the first couple of days we were in Osh, the first thing they asked was “How come I can’t be a refugee?” And you have to explain that you have to cross an international boundary. There’s a convention that your government signed with 138 other countries. Because you’re still in your own country, you can’t be considered a refugee. Somebody said, “I have no house, I have no home, I have no job. I lost everything. My husband was killed. Why can’t I be a refugee? What do I have to do to be a refugee?” The only country that was admitting refugees when we left was Tajikistan, which has about 500, though some people were trying to get into Kazakhstan as well.

The question is, where do we go from here? We’ve been happy to see that the OSCE finally agreed and the Kyrgyz government agreed to deploy 52 police monitors, unarmed. There’ve been demonstrations in the three cities affected—spontaneous demonstrations well organized with cell phones and signs—that these are not needed. The mayor of Osh said he didn’t need any help in policing. He could take care of the situation. He knew who the criminals were. The OSCE, with the best intentions, only approved the proposal last week. They’re now raising the money. They can send the people for up to four months. They’re unarmed. Their job would be to go out and patrol as they’ve done in Bosnia and Kosovo and also to try to monitor the human rights situation. Is it true that Uzbeks are getting arrested? Is it true that every Uzbek arrested is beaten up before he or she is released? There were widespread claims of substantial sexual and gender-based violence. There is no doubt that there was some. This is a very conservative community, particularly in the South. People are not willing, and understandably, are not talking about this. So medical doctors, particularly in the Uzbek community, acknowledged that a couple of people were treated in Uzbekistan for gender-based violence—one of our great concerns.

The US has been a supporter that tries to develop aspects of the civil society and democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan. It still has the Manas Airbase. When you fly into Bishkek, you can see all the C1-30s and other kinds of US military equipment sitting on the ground. When you go through customs and immigration, you see these guys without necks. You know who those people are. They’re security contractors flying out to work. That’s the main refueling base for the US operation in Afghanistan. The US also has permission to build a training center in the more crowded part of the country, obviously in the South. The Russians have an airbase in the North. The Russians increased the number of soldiers at their base a week and a half ago. The Russians had permission to build a training center in the South from Bakiyev, as the US did, but they’ve promised that they won’t do anything until there’s a new parliamentary government and they renegotiate that contract. The US base agreement was up in August. It requires a six month advance notification. President Otunbayeva has said that she will abide by the previous arrangement. But there’ll be a new parliament in October, and I guess the US will have to renegotiate. Right now, the US has done very little on the humanitarian side. No surprise. The US announced that it has committed \$42 million dollars. The UN appeal for all of Kyrgyzstan, for relief efforts, is \$96 million. The US has contributed about 5%. Normally we would



contribute about 20-25%. In part, this is because the US says it wants to do its own kinds of things. Housing has to be done immediately. There are 30,000 people without homes. You can live in tents in the summer. Most people live with host families with 30, 40, 50 people living in a compound. It is fine for the summer, but it's going to be really tough for the winter. Twenty-five below zero temperatures Celsius are not going to be good enough. There's the whole question about how the education system is going to function. At least three or four schools have been destroyed. Will Kyrgyz kids go to schools that are in Uzbek neighborhoods, and will Uzbek kids go to schools in Kyrgyz neighborhoods? Big question. So far, no government has stepped up and has been willing to underpin the stuff that needs to be done in the education sector, which is really important to the future of the country and also for people's sense of hope and stability. I'm going to stop there and take your questions.

**Ms. Ellis:** Thank you very much Dawn. I just wanted to follow up on the issue of what the Russians have been doing in any way, shape, or form aside from their military base regarding this situation. What difference could the OSCE police possibly make? They're coming in September, 52 advisory police. The other question is, why did it start? How are these tensions going to end? What is it going to take to really end them?

**Ms. Calabria:** Well, it's interesting, when you talk to people in Kyrgyzstan you get one set of reasons why it happened and when you go to Uzbekistan, you get another set. In Uzbekistan you get: Russia and Russian influence. Uzbekistan has tried to have a very independent foreign policy relatively speaking. The Uzbeks in Uzbekistan are a little more suspicious about the Russians than maybe anybody else in the region. In Kyrgyzstan, we put out a bulletin on our website, [refugeesinternational.org](http://refugeesinternational.org). That bulletin laid out everything that people told us: ethnic tensions, weak central government, poor local institutions, corruption, Bakiyev—the former president—and his friends and supporters trying to demonstrate that the new government can't take hold and give him the chance to come back to power and his political party a chance to come back as well, ethnic rivalries because Kyrgyzstan in the rural areas is an extremely poor country. In the urban areas, people are more successful and have more access to services. Many of the Uzbeks have substantial homes, cars, and businesses. There is some envy, particularly with the rural Kyrgyz. There is a feeling of doubt about the country's ability to deal with the whole question of corruption in the South. It's a major drug trafficking route between Afghanistan, China, Russia, etc. Criminal elements are very substantial—smuggling, etc. Some of you have worked on trafficking in the country and they say that Kyrgyzstan exports a large number of people for labor overseas. Many of these people get tricked. They think they're going work as a secretary and they find out they're being prostituted. Or they think they're going to get a salary and they wind up working in slave labor conditions. The government has been trying to cooperate on that, but when you don't see any options and there's no employment, and investment in the country has not been as great as they had hoped. Russia has a \$300 million loan to Kyrgyzstan for various programs. When the refugees went home, the Russians announced that \$100 million of that loan could be used for relief and reconstruction purposes. There was a donor pledging conference on July 27<sup>th</sup>. The US and other countries at that donor pledging conference made the point several times to the government that, "We want to help you economically." They have almost a \$6 million deficit, current services deficit, and unlike the US, they can't print their money very quickly. Nobody will take it. They needed that international support and there are a number of donors who said that, "We will give you this support but we

want you to permit people to rebuild their own homes and to respect their property rights and to respect the rights of individuals in the country.” Whether that will really translate and whether there will be monitoring of those things is another question.

**Question:** I’m Louise Shelly and I’m a professor at George Mason in the grad program at the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center. Last year when I was in Kyrgyzstan, I was hearing a lot about issues in the South, from the drug administration admitting that drug agents were involved in torturing Uzbeks in the South; some were involved in the drug trade and those types of things. I spoke to human rights leaders and they were talking about them killing people. The seeds of this were there. I wrote something about the corruption explosion with government. And what you’re describing in Osh and sportsmen reminds me of Soviet organized crime. So what is this doing—you mentioned drugs now—but what is this doing in terms of having an organized crime presence not in major metropolitan areas down there with these sportsmen who are Russian organized crime figures, not just sportsmen?

**Ms. Calabria:** When I asked about the Chief of Police in Osh, they said, “Don’t you know who he is? He used to run the biggest criminal gang in town!” It is very much the post-Soviet model. I’m glad you pointed that out. That’s why I say they suffer from geography and history. And it’s very tough. Bakiyev, one of his reasons for going down was a scandal that his brother was raking \$6 million a month off the oil contracts for the US base. Some investigation is going on in Congress on that particular issue. How do you change things? It’s a long, slow process, but I think the donors that are giving money for the particular programs and opportunities have to make sure that that money is well spent. We’re trying to hold people accountable for what’s going on. The whole question in any society is, how do you convince people that they have to build accountable institutions and that they have rights to ask questions? The question on Uzbek education being secondary, the Uzbeks developed their own private university—the founder was a wealthy businessman. One of the first buildings torched in Jalalabad, which is the other major Uzbek city, was this university, right on the main street. When you drive into Osh from the airport, what’s amazing is that you go down the main street and there’s just devastation on each side of the street because it was Uzbek-owned businesses and Uzbek families. And I’ve been in a lot of post-conflict situations. But they all took two or three or four years to get to this level of devastation. Every house is burned. In some cases, the burning only goes one or two blocks off the main street, either because the people barricaded themselves in—built tank traps in some cases—or because the demonstrations and the attacks were really to scare people. And it is scary to drive down two or three blocks and there’s nothing living left on the property.

**Question:** I’m Stevie Kelly from the State Department. I was in Osh three years ago conducting research on Uzbek education in what was widely reputed to be the best Uzbek school in Osh. And at the best school, a good day was if half the teachers showed up for work. Not a single student had a full textbook. I won’t even talk to you about how terrible the infrastructure was. To me, one of the major issues—and you touched on this—what can be done to fix this incredibly broken system? If Uzbek children, who want to go to an Uzbek language school, don’t have access to education, there’s no way they’ll improve their station in life regardless of any other things.

**Ms. Calabia:** UNICEF is working very hard with a couple of governments and a number of NGOs to try to do something with the curriculum and some training for teachers who are going to be dealing with kids with post traumatic stress disorder and, in some cases, are living in very temporary kinds of places. They're talking about redoing the textbooks—the Open Society Institute. George Soros is interested in helping with some of this area. But it's going to take a big investment and a sustained investment and operation.

Uzbek and Kyrgyz victims said to us, “Do not give any money to the government.” But obviously you have to develop government and institutions. Education is very important, health care is another one. Uzbeks are afraid to go to the hospital. In one case, we were in a community and the hospital was literally across the street. And people said, “We tried to go there, but they turned us away.” “Who turned you away? The doctors, the nurses?” “No, no, it was the security guard at the front desk. It was the receptionist at the desk. It was the people hooting at us in the waiting room, so we left.” So they will only go to Uzbek doctors or NGO doctors. The UN has gone in and met with the Ministry of Health and they've said that they will deploy armed guards outside some of these hospitals to prevent them from attacks. That's a small step in the right direction. The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights is trying to deploy human rights monitors and legal advisors to the South. UNHCR is trying to do the same thing and beef up the presence. And that's why US support for those operations is extremely important. Because there are a number of Kyrgyz and Uzbek lawyers and others who are willing to go in and help people and give them good advice and help them get their deeds and their documents back. But by the same token, we need to have a lot of them. Because, as one human rights group explained to us, “On Monday, I had seven lawyers who were willing to take people to court. They had a couple hundred cases. I went back two weeks later and there was only one lawyer because they had all been threatened.” There was nobody to go with them to court. If an international person went with them to court to file the documents, they'd probably accept the documents; at least we hope they would. And that's what the OSCE presence and the presence of the UN could do.

**Question:** I'm Jennifer Harkin and I'm also from the State Department. I just returned from Geneva where we met with OHCHR and talked about creating a Commission of Inquiry, which I think is actually going to be operational hopefully before these elections. But in that vein, I'm interested to know how you combat the increasing rhetoric that is used in terms of talking about Uzbeks. How do we fight the information war that we are losing very badly there?

**Ms. Calabia:** The two Uzbek television stations were destroyed in the South. And obviously, it's useful to have Radio Free Europe broadcasts. I understand that the US has been developing some footage. But by the time you give it to the local stations, and they edit it, and possibly use pieces but not the whole thing, it's not very useful. I think you use all the weapons you can. I think a Twitter campaign would work. We talked to some of the NGOs about that because again, people have cell phones. The UNHCR set up a hotline so that people can call in. The US Embassy has a hotline, which I didn't find about until I came back and read their website. Nobody mentioned it to me, not even the embassy people. I would have happily taken around cards and handed out flyers to people. When we were there, the UN didn't even have a flyer, although they were running a public information thing on television. But again, a lot of people don't have television and radios. We talked to a group of Kyrgyz, they were really nervous, and someone said, “We should get them some radios and TVs.” And one older woman in the back shouted out, “They

don't tell the truth on our TVs. Why bother? We want somebody objective to give us information." Maybe more international presence, more documentary, more stuff will help. Russia has a role to play in this. Russian TV and news are widely followed in the region. They could be helpful. I don't think they have done much.

**Question:** I have a question regarding refugee registration for those that do qualify under the UN convention. I read on the way here that the official numbers are that about 20,000 people left the country after June 10<sup>th</sup>. Some of the people are still in Uzbekistan, including my family. The problem I run into trying to find out what they could do is that, without the possibility to be registered, they are not able to do anything. For example, if they needed to legally leave Uzbekistan—leave the country—is there anything they can do about that?

**Ms. Calabria:** Refugee registration is a real issue. If a country hasn't acceded to the Refugee Convention, they're still bound by customary international law. We had one brief conversation in Uzbekistan with someone in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The theme was basically, "Some of these people have permission to stay. But we've said the refugee program was over. We've said that they can go back to Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan's said they'll welcome them all back. They can go back with impunity." UNHCR is trying to reestablish its presence. It does have a small refugee resettlement program for Tajik refugees who are in Uzbekistan from earlier days. UNHCR had an active presence in the country until 2005. Before that point, you could go and register with UNHCR and there was an attempt to get you permission to stay in the country, at least give you some identity documents that said somebody knew you were there and was trying to take care of you. UNDP has a couple of officers who were continuing to work with the refugee resettlement program. They have a couple hundred people registered at this point in time, because Tajiks, unfortunately, have never been granted full citizenships in Uzbekistan, unlike the Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan. Obviously what the international community is hoping is that Uzbekistan's move in this direction and its recognition of the continuing problems in the country will make them, at best, look the other way at all the people who are on their territory illegally. Every country has illegal residents at different points in time. The problem for these people is, what is their future? You can stay with friends and relatives, but how do you work? How do you support yourself? Some refugees leave substantial assets in Iraq and other in other places. Most exhaust those and you wear out your friends and your family for a couple months. Those are big questions and we are concerned about them.

**Question:** I'm Josh Kucera from EurasiaNet. You mentioned briefly the role of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. I'm wondering if you can go into a little more detail about how you see their role in terms of accepting refugees.

**Ms. Calabria:** Kazakhstan closed its borders during the troubles. It supposedly has since admitted that there are some refugees on its territory. Kazakhstan does have a process whereby people can register. Tajikistan has a presence of UNHCR in the country and is in the process of developing its own refugee status determination. It's what would happen to you if you got to the United States—at some point, you have to go through an interview with the equivalent of Homeland Security. Tajikistan doesn't have this system all worked out yet, but, as far as we understand, they are willing to allow people to stay on their territory and to allow the UNHCR to provide some assistance to them. Kazakhstan, we've asked the embassy here, officially they could talk

about what they are doing. They said they knew they had some refugees, but they haven't gotten back to us about exactly how they were going to be treated. Because the whole question of admission to a country is obviously up to the country. By the same token, everybody says they believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that they respect customary international law, and we hope that that continues to happen.

**Question:** I'm Karen Saunders from George Mason University. I was quite struck by your discussion of the seeming preparedness of Uzbekistan to house and care for the 100,000 refugees and that was, as I understand, prior to the international community's presence. I wonder if you could discuss whether that raised your esteem of Uzbekistan, your hopes for refugees in Uzbekistan, your eyebrows, or all three.

**Ms. Calabia:** Uzbekistan does have a ministry that deals with the whole question of emergency response. In the country, there's a lot of flooding—flash floods—even though it's supposedly a semi-arid territory. We have some pictures of driving from the border crossing in Osh into Uzbekistan and up the countryside and you go through the Ferghana Valley and you see nothing but vines—which surprised me, in a Muslim country, that they make wine—and also fruit trees, and some cotton still. You see the huge industrial sites that the Russians built and which the Uzbek government is still saddled with—the largest power generation plant in the country, one of the largest nuclear plants in the world. Uzbekistan is a country of 28 million people with a substantially larger GDP than Kyrgyzstan, which is a tiny country population wise. They had some of the buildings because they do respond to their own natural disasters. They did close the border from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup>, so in a sense they had almost three days to do some stuff. They mobilized and they used the educational infrastructure, so the first people called up were the people in Andijan and Namangan and Ferghana. And then they filled in people from the Ministry of Health. The officials told us that they didn't realize how much medical and psychosocial services you need in an emergency, especially in a terrible, conflict-induced one. One of the reasons they were interested in working with UNHCR, at least in a preliminary way, was to improve their capacity to respond in emergencies. That's one of the things the UN agencies do fairly well. They know how to do the training and they've developed protocols. ICRC also has been there for some time. They work on cases like tuberculosis in prisons, a problem in all former Soviet countries. So was Uzbekistan prepared, did they know in advance? I don't know. Uzbekistan obviously knows the countryside quite well. There are suspicions on both sides that they have spies and informers and friends and all that stuff is on television. Were they overly prepared? I don't know. They certainly mobilized things very quickly and did a very good job. They were overwhelmed at the end. There were people standing in muddy fields, which is not anybody's idea of good refugee reception. They were very concerned about the status of children. Fortunately, there were very few unaccompanied children. Usually in flight situations, kids get separated from their parents. But, in this case, they only knew of two cases and they had been able to fly the kids back to Osh after most of the refugees had gone home.

**Question:** I'm Robbie Hayes with USAID. I haven't heard you speak about Turkmenistan. Have they any involvement?

**Ms. Calabia:** In Kyrgyzstan—based on the little I know about the country and I must admit, I'm a quick study but there are some of you who probably know much more about the country than I

do, frankly—when they talk about their friends, they talk about Kazakhstan, Russia, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and one or two other countries. There’s a small German population in the country—again, thanks to the Soviet policy of moving people around. That’s who they talked about in terms of their friends. When you asked Uzbeks where they had studied or where they had done other kinds of work, many of them had studied in Uzbekistan at the universities there. Obviously, due to the language similarity, some of them had scholarships to study there. A few had studied abroad. A few had studied in the US. A number of the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz have worked in the Gulf, because that’s another place labor was needed. In terms of response, the government has been heartened by the amount of interest and response. Whether they’re able to pull this country together—some of the people who work in the South who are Kyrgyz were extremely pessimistic, saying they thought that there could be a civil war by the time of the election. Certainly, there were demonstrations in Bishkek yesterday. And what happens, unfortunately, in these countries is that police or elements of the security forces fire into the crowds. This time it was over their heads. But if they fire into the crowd, that’s really bad. Again, international police training—you hope you can do it. One proposal that we think is an interesting one is moving the security forces from the North to the South and the South to the North, so at least you’d have a change of personality, a change in some of the corruption webs and contacts. And particularly for the police if you could do that and because it’s an international police force, ostensibly you’re able to move them around. Whether that will actually happen, I don’t know. The mayor has opposed some of those ideas.

**Question:** I’m Stephanie Keene and I’m with the Department of Justice. Have you have any further word or complaints of gender-based violence?

**Ms. Calabria:** What’s interesting is that the women in Kyrgyzstan are tough. Roza Otunbayeva is one example, but there are lots of others. The day after we left Jalalabad, which is the other major city, we heard really scary stories about people being picked up on the street, kids disappearing, kidnappings, terrible ransom demands—“Come to the morgue and claim your son’s body.” The Uzbek women started demonstrating and went out—it’s a major trading city—and blocked entry for trucks and cars, saying to the mayor and to national TV, “You have to stop this. You have to stop picking up our husbands and our children. This is unacceptable behavior. We are citizens of this country. Do something about it.” Fortunately, the police didn’t fire on them and they went home afterwards. The mayor promised things. There’ve been some efforts in Jalalabad for reconciliation. One major mosque has brought together some of the elders and some of the young people in the community to talk about how they can work together and how they can rebuild friendships, contacts, and reconciliation. How do you get mosques involved in this, in getting the message out? So there’s a lot to do. These people are still very afraid and I’m afraid that if there are elements that want to further disrupt the country, they could do that easily at this time.

In terms of gender-based violence, the UN has been very sensitive to that response. I’d like to give kudos to the UNFPA [the United Nations Population Fund] and also to UNICEF for their efforts to develop psychosocial support and the World Health Organization and UNFPA for giving some of the doctors in the public hospitals, and also in the Uzbek community—further training and information, getting kits and materials two days after the problem started in the South. UNFPA did a local procurement, which in the UN system is unusual. Usually you go to

your warehouse and you ship it in by airplane. It takes a couple of days, sometimes a week. Instead, they did local procurement and got sanitary materials, diapers, and napkins to the people massed in these temporary camps along the border who were living on the side of the road. In some cases, there would be a family that would have 200 people in their courtyard. UNFPA and UNICEF got out to those places quickly with water and WFP [World Food Programme] has continued to do some food aid.

**Question:** I'm Swathi Balasubramanian from IREX. A couple of weeks ago I was in Kyrgyzstan. A lot of our work is based on young girls and youth in the South. It seems like there's a lot of opportunity for youth to start at the grassroots, local level reconciliation efforts. I was wondering if you have any thoughts on that front.

**Ms. Calabia:** We met with a group called Intervallum in Osh, that some of you may know. It's a civic society group and they trace together a lot of organizations—Kyrgyz and Uzbek—to work on local issues and concerns: development, economic issues, community and neighborhood improvement. They were talking about a major youth initiative that they are looking for help from the EU to do. One of the practical reasons is that there is high unemployment among young men and women in the South, and a feeling that those kinds of efforts would be useful and would give them the opportunity to work in construction or to repair buildings. That was an idea people had.

If I could leave you with one message it would be that the US should support the international relief efforts and the humanitarian aid. \$96 million—the US usually gives 25% of that money, but so far they've given about 6%. They've got their own program, but I think it's important to work in solidarity with the United Nations. I think particularly they should be supporting UNICEF and some of the educational programs and working to fully develop Kyrgyz civil society. The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and also UNHCR want to work with some of the local legal aid organizations and the women's organization in the South to get out these messages of reconciliation, but also to make sure that people know where they can go for help. I think that's really important. If you say that to people you know, that would help a whole lot. Without public support, it's very difficult in these tight economic times. You say, "Well, the US already had all this development money and these programs for Kyrgyzstan. Why should they do more?" But I think it's important to help the stability of the country. It's a little bit like Emily's List, for those of you who know that women's organization. "Early money is like yeast." Well, early money for housing, education, and healthcare can make a big difference in this country.