



**Beyond the Headlines**  
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**Esther Brimmer**  
Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations

***US Priorities at the UN General Assembly***

**Patricia Ellis:** Good afternoon and make sure you can all hear me in the back there? Fantastic. Okay, so good afternoon and welcome. We are so pleased you all could join us today for this Beyond the Headlines event with Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, Esther Brimmer, who will speak about the US priorities at the 67<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, which just got started. So the turnout [today] is a real tribute to Esther, it's a real tribute to the interest in the UN and the US priorities at the UN. So I think a number of you know me, but for those of you that don't, I'm Patricia Ellis. I am president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. This is our new home, in this new building, so this is our first big event here and we are so glad that you could join us here. We promote women's leadership, women's voices on the pressing international issues of the day, and I just wanted to extend a warm welcome first of all to the many members of the diplomatic community that are here with us. I'm not going to recognize everyone, but I would just recognize two women ambassadors who we work closely with, the Ambassador of Bahrain and the new Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And the diplomats, why don't you just raise your hands so that we can get a sense of how many are in the room. [*Laughter.*] Fantastic, fantastic! Also, a very warm welcome to the members of the UN community, of whom I know there are many, and thank you all for coming.

This event is particularly timely, as I mentioned the UN General Assembly just opened, there are a lot of important issues going on. But there's been particular focus on Syria and Iran lately, and we will get into those and many other issues after Esther Brimmer speaks. I will open it up with a couple of questions, and then I always try to get to as many questions as possible so I am only going to ask people to ask one question, keep them brief, and then we can get into a really good discussion and dialogue because I know that there is so much to discuss. So before I introduce Esther, I just wanted to mention a few other events that we have coming up. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, we are going to have a brown bag relating to a World Bank study on women and gender. All of this information is at your place, so we hope you can join us. And then, another one of your colleagues [*gesturing to Brimmer*], on October 10<sup>th</sup>, we are going to have Assistant Secretary Anne Richard talk about the Syrian refugee crisis, and so much is happening there.

So it's really a great pleasure to introduce our speaker who I have known for a really long time, who has a very impressive career. I'm just going to give you some of the highlights in the interest of time, but just to begin, Dr. Brimmer was nominated by President Obama to her current position in March of 2009 and then confirmed by the Senate in April. And as most of you know, as the leader of the Bureau of International Affairs, she works on advancing US interests in international organizations. Amongst the many areas she works on human rights, peacekeeping, food security, humanitarian relief and climate change to name a few. [*Laughter.*] Before that she was at CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies] and was the deputy director and director of research for the Center for Transatlantic Relations. Before that she served in the government, she had a two year stint in Policy Planning, where she worked on the EU, Western Europe and also multilateral issues. She was a member of the US delegation to the US Commission on Human Rights. She was a Special Assistant to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. And just a couple of other things--so, her career has

spanned government, also think-tanks and the nonprofit world, she was at the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, she worked on the Hill with the Democratic Study Group, and also at McKinsey.

So, please join me in welcoming Esther Brimmer. [*Applause.*]

**Dr. Esther Brimmer:** First, thank you very much for that warm welcome. I'm delighted to be here in your new premises, this is a beautifully, airy, lovely space. I wish you continued success in your new home. I'm actually a member of the Women's Foreign Policy Group so I have been a long standing fan of the organization and the discussions you have had here. You are a real institution in Washington and it is a pleasure to be here. And again, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us for this conversation today. I'll spend a bit of time talking about the upcoming General Assembly and priorities and issues that we see, but also make sure we definitely have time for discussion and questions and so forth.

I think it's really been—its obviously been—a trying week for all of us in the State Department, but for all of us who care about foreign policy and diplomacy. We think that, of course, one of the essences of diplomacy is the ability to agree and disagree peacefully and to recognize that no issue justifies violence. And so I think as we look ahead towards the General Assembly, I think recommitting to the values that underpin diplomacy I think is going to be part of how we are thinking about the upcoming session. There are very difficult issues that we are tackling, difficult issues both about tolerance and freedom of expression, but also we recognize that there is a line drawn between any disagreements and the use of violence.

Now, just looking at the General Assembly, obviously this is something like our diplomatic world's fair for us all who do multilateral diplomacy, but it is also extremely important to the Obama Administration. As you know multilateral diplomacy has been a central tenant of the administration, recognizing that in order to advance the foreign policy goals, that you need to use all of your tools—bilateral and multilateral—and because of the integral relationship of multilateral diplomacy, the work both at the General Assembly and across the UN system is particularly important. And we recognize that it is always going to be complicated, as I talk about this, recognize that there will be a challenge to face in the upcoming General Assembly, but we recognize that this is in a sense an opportunity to cast a spotlight on the importance of working together on some of the most complicated issues, the types of issues that transcend borders—peace and security, human rights, environmental issues. And so that although I will be talking about the General Assembly, particularly the high-level ten days coming up, talking about the General Assembly session, the 67<sup>th</sup> session—this is part of what we do all year. And recognizing that the work that we do all year, hopefully that leads to success when we're particularly working at the General Assembly.

If we look ahead, as you know the session has officially opened yesterday so we are now in the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly with the high-level speeches beginning next week. On Tuesday, the President of the United States will speak, on Tuesday morning in the fourth slot, as is traditional. The types of items that we will be looking at—and we're looking at four different areas, particularly on security issues, on human rights and the rule of law, looking particularly at some development issues, and on how we will advance reform and budget issues. I will go through a little bit of that in a little more detail.

Now, on the peace and security side we have both events that the Secretary General will host, that will be looking at thematic areas, most particularly looking at the Secretary General's event that he will host, looking at combating nuclear terrorism. This of course compliments the ongoing work within the UN system on dealing with terrorism issues, but also the important work on using the multilateral system to address the challenges of nuclear weapons, and dealing with the most dangerous weapons on the planet. This happens in many different venues. Of course we recognize the role of the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty], we are very active in IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] and we will

see this work being done next week in Europe as well, it's complimenting what is a fundamental part of the work on peace and security in the multilateral system of dealing with nuclear issues. And that will be next week.

We will also see, of the course the General Assembly offers an opportunity to talk about some of the most pressing issues of the day. So we will see also a focus, particularly, on some of the issues that are confronting Africa. There will be a session that will look at the Sahel, including Mali, but then trying to recognize the integrated relationship between the security issues, the counterterrorism issues, as well as the governance issues within Mali and the Sahel. There will be a session on Somalia, and here again it is remarkable—think about it, for the first time in two decades Somalia has a government—and the international community was part of the effort to do that. And whether it was the peacekeeping operation conducted by the African Union AMISON [African Union Mission in Somalia], to which the United Nations provides support, but the longstanding efforts on both the diplomacy and the efforts of Somalis themselves, that is truly remarkable. And we are looking at what are the continued ways to help support the Somali people at this time, and in an area that is challenged, also, by environmental and other issues as well in the Horn of Africa.

There will also be a session looking at Sudan and South Sudan—the continued humanitarian and security issues that we see on Sudan and South Sudan. There will also be a session looking at the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a session looking at the Middle East.

Germany has the presidency of the Security Council this month and so it will be organizing the sessions particularly on the Middle East next week. That will probably focus, initially that will focus probably particularly on some of the Syria issues, but I think they will be looking at obviously some of the more recent issues as well. So we have a whole range of peace and security issues, and again you have the opportunity, both through the multilateral meetings, but also through ongoing bilateral conversations since you have world leaders in one place looking at the immediate issues on the agenda.

Turning to the rule of law, the Secretary General will host an event on the rule of law on Monday. It's an all-day session which will look at a variety of aspects of international support for rule of law, and the importance of the rule of law to good governance and human rights issues. One aspect of that will be a session on women's access to justice event. The United States, working with several other partners will be launching the Equal Futures Partnership, which will particularly look at enhancing political and economic opportunities for women and girls. This builds on our consistent support for gender equity and for the efforts to try to work through the multilateral system, something we have done in a variety of ways in terms of specific programs, our support for UN Women, and a variety of other ways. So the Equal Futures Partnership again will be launched next Monday and is again part of the administration's strong support for gender equity issues.

We will also have the high-level panel on the post-2015 framework for development. And this is part of the larger effort to be working on development issues and sustainable development issues. As you know, the Secretary General has launched a high-level panel which brings together leaders from—there are 27 members, some of which are ex-officio—23 members from a variety of countries to look at how to shape the Millennium Development Goals post-2015. So of course there will be the important element both of the continuing commitment to the existing Millennium Development Goals—and something the US always points out is that we are very much focused on making sure we are continuing to work on the current Millennium Development Goals—but we very much look forward to, and support the effort of the new high-level panel which will help also shape this conversation on the post-15 period, and will compliment some of the other conversations happening that have come out of Rio +20 and other processes as well. But that high-level panel will convene for the first time next week as well. And we all look forward to seeing how that will move forward and become part of the important discussion on development issues.

But in order to make all of this work, that we will continue our very intense effort working on particularly budget issues and management reform issues within the UN system. Because, again, we are placing much greater weight on the UN system. We are asking it to do more. But we think we need to continue to work on relevant reforms to make it able to bear that weight, to make it more stream-lined and effective. As you know in the past year, that the Secretary General supported a budget, that for the first time had a reduction compared to the year before—I'm sorry—only the second time in history and the first time in over a decade. And we thought that was important because all of us are having to make important choices in constrained budget times. Most donors to the United Nation—both treaty supporters as well as those who make additional voluntary contributions—are all in a financial difficulty. We are all having to make sure that we make smart choices so we can continue to support programs that we think are extremely important. And so we are working very closely with the Secretary and other member states on how to affect the way the budgets are going forward and to look at important elements of transparency. There have been some really important developments over the past year, as we saw more UN member agencies posting their audits online—and other elements of transparency. That's the type of long-term work that helps make a stronger institution. And it's because we want an institution to work that you'll continue to work in these areas as well. So we anticipate continued work on that area as well.

And then as we look at some of the issues that we see very much in the agenda, I suspect given the number of world leaders and the importance of the issues, that we will be talking—about some of the issues confronting Syria I would think and what are the other ways to move forward given the humanitarian and political issues that are going on there. I would say we continue work, thinking about dealing with nuclear weapons proliferation issues, will always be important as well. And that compliments work that's going on in other parts of the international system, as you know the IAEA Board of Governors is underway as well. We will also continue, as we look out, in addition to the sort-of high-level meetings in the high-level week—it's really ten days, the debate is going to go through the second of October, that Tuesday—but we will also continue our work looking at how we strengthen key mechanisms of the UN system, including peacekeeping, but also special political missions and looking at how to support the mechanisms on the political side as well as the peacekeeping side. We will also—of course there will be several resolutions looking in the human rights side in the third committee.

But I would say overall—I will conclude where I began, which is that I think we will be focused on the need to reinforce the values that underpin diplomacy and foreign policy at its best. As many of you know, the president spoke at the State Department on Wednesday, the day after the attack in Libya, and the point he made and the point the Secretary reinforced is the need to recommit to the values of tolerance and of human rights, and to reject violence. I think that as we go about our daily business we are very much imbued with the spirit of how we commit to the fundamental values that should underpin foreign policy.

**Ellis:** Thank you so much, Esther. I'm going to open it up, and I'm going to start with two issues that have been on everyone's mind and in the news—Syria and Iran—and you did mention this. Mr. Brahimi, the Arab League and the UN Envoy who succeeded Kofi Annan, you know just had extensive meetings in Syria and basically what he said was that the escalating conflict is a threat to Syria, the region and the whole world. The UN Security Council has been paralyzed by the splits amongst the permanent members, particularly Russia and China, and so the question is, what other diplomatic options does the UN have? And can the UN actually do something about the Syrian situation or do solutions have to be found without the UN? And I would just like to bring in something because you said there are bilateral meetings, there are also regional meetings, so how important is the role of the regional partners and neighbors in this particular situation, particularly since there is also the humanitarian refugees crisis and you know fighting on the border with Turkey for example?

**Brimmer:** Indeed. Thank you for the question. Indeed, the Syrian situation is one of the most serious on the international agenda. We have all been just horrified by the loss of life that we have seen for well over a year. The United States and many other countries have been speaking out about this issue very,

very early on and recognizing that it was going to have an impact first on the Syrian people, but on the region and international peace and security at large. And this is why we thought it would be appropriate that it was on the agenda for the Security Council and why we supported resolutions at the Security Council on this issue. We do see it as a direct threat to international peace and security. As you know we were extremely disappointed the Russian Federation and China vetoed that. But as you know there was strong support for it among the rest of the membership on the Security Council. And twice—not once but twice—the rest of the United Nations has voted in the General Assembly, an extraordinary step, both in February and in August to express the concern of the international community about the impact of the crisis in Syria. So indeed, we would have thought that the best method would be able to use all the tools available through the multilateral system, and bilaterally as well, at the moment we do not see immediate additional action in the Security Council. However, we do think that it is important to recognize that there are several ways that the United Nations is playing an important role in addressing the crisis, and the United States supports these. First off, to say that the human rights aspect of this has been one area where the UN Human Rights Council and its members have been the most forward, leading with the UN system, holding not one, not two, but three special sessions on Syria in 2011 to call attention to the human rights issues, authorizing the Commission of Inquiry, which although they have been denied entry into Syria, have interviewed people who have come out of Syria, and it has actually provided some of the clearest, professional, impartial documentation of the situation in Syria. And their most recent report, which they just reported on in Geneva, again was very clear about the implications of what is happening and the spillover effect. And so we think those are important examples. We think they are important efforts that are complimentary to this effort. There is an effort led by several nongovernmental organizations looking at collecting data for long-term accountability, to recognize that when the Syrian people are ready to receive that evidence of what has happened, that the people who helped to perpetrate this violence will be held accountable.

We also think that there is a huge humanitarian role. As you know, there have been thousands and thousands and tens of thousands of refugees who have crossed borders and are being housed whether in Turkey, in Jordan, in other countries that have been extremely generous in taking on board the refugees across borders. There are many displaced people within Syria as well. The UN agencies are on the ground there, trying to provide absolutely crucial humanitarian assistance as well. I think it's important that countries be able to contribute and make donations. The United States has now contributed over one hundred million dollars in humanitarian support for the Syrian people. We also think, as the United States, that we want to continue to support political transition in the country. We think it's important to look at how the eventual political transition should take place, we also support the non-violent opposition with non-lethal assistance, and we will continue to work on that in terms of logistics and communications areas. So we think we're trying to look at all of that, but recognizing the daily humanitarian toll that this is taking. This is such an important issue, I would fully expect global leaders next week be trying to talk further about next steps on this, but it would be extremely difficult to—

**Ellis:** What about the role of the regional organizations in trying to solve that, if the UN can't actually get action in the Security Council?

**Brimmer:** Indeed. The regional organizations have played such an important role. I mean, when we note the really unprecedented role played by the Arab League, for example in particular, which has brought together its member states both in terms of helping along with the UN to work on creating the six-point plan that Kofi Annan was advancing, because it was the Arab League-UN Plan, and again this was an unprecedented role played by a regional organization. It is extremely important to bring in voices of the region and help channel those voices to try and help address a crisis in the region. We think that many member states in the region will continue to want to be involved and will have important voices to play in terms of helping the Syrian people to try and manage this transition.

**Ellis:** Before opening it up, let's turn to Iran. There have been various levels of sanctions and the EU and the US and Russia and China are going to be meeting around the UN General Assembly session

to talk further and under Katherine Ashton's auspices—she was just in Iran. What's next? What can we anticipate? Can anything more be done diplomatically in terms of sanctions? I mean I know you know there has been a lot of saber-rattling, and I am just wondering if you could address that.

**Brimmer:** Well we think it is important to continue to engage in robust diplomacy to address Iran as we clearly, and it has been documented numerous times, violated its international obligations. And so we are looking at all the different tools that are relevant to use. I would anticipate that, indeed, as key leaders with the position next week, they will be looking at the most relevant next steps. We know, in particular, that it is important to use all the tools of the ongoing multilateral system and so we would particularly note that the work that we have done in IAEA, just this past weekend to report, will invest in the multilateral system. Since you have institutions there you are able to provide credible analysis of what is going on in the IAEA, which is absolutely invaluable for the forums to show us what is really going on. So we think that that will very much help form and help to gather what is going to actually be the next step in terms of supporting sanctions.

**Ellis:** Okay, so we are going to open it up and if it is okay with you I will take a few questions together so we can get to—okay so who would like to begin? Just Odeh, Don, and this woman here. Okay and then just keep it brief and just if you could stand up and identify yourself just because we have a lot of people going all the way back. Thank you.

**Question:** I am Odeh Aburdene from Capital Trust Group. Go back to the—It seems to me that the US and Russia have been against the Brahimi mission and if they are all... [*Inaudible.*]

**Ellis:** Okay the question was—the role of the Brahimi mission and can he bring the US and Russia together to help in the resolution of the problem in the region and Syria.

**Question:** Hi, I am Don Kraus with GlobalSolutions.org. Thank you so much for being here. President Obama's speech at the General Assembly is such a wonderful opportunity to educate Americans about the US role in the UN, and the role of the UN. What do you see as his major talking points for this year that he will be highlighting so that those of us who are in the business of educating about this can do some reinforcement?

**Question:** Amy Fraenkel with the United Nations Environment Programme. As you know we just came out of this major sustainable development meeting in Rio, and you mentioned it in connection with post-2015 Goals. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about sustainable development as a priority of the UN General Assembly.

**Brimmer:** Okay, great—very rich menu of questions! First of all, to start out on your question about the role that Ambassador Brahimi will be playing, I think first off to say I think he will be focusing on Syria and the Syrian people and what may be the right next steps to help advance the Syrian people in their transition will be the focus. I do not think that the focus will necessarily be on the Security Council, though I will note that you said that there was some sort of an inequality there and the United States is in the mainstream, kind of the majority, of the Security Council is not the outlier there. We did not vote to veto the resolution, so we are very much within the membership of the UN and want to see this issue resolved.

Just turning to the President's speech, I will never get involved with the White House or wondering what the President will be saying. As you know, the speech is always seen as a major statement on foreign policy issues and given his great appreciation for US engagement in the UN, I think he will be highlighting, again, the benefits of multilateral engagements for America and for the world, internationally. I think he will have a wide reaching speech next Tuesday.

And then looking at the development issues, indeed, and many things came out of the Rio +20 conference this summer, and we will be looking at how to take up those issues. I think there are several

different issues; I only touched on the highlights. The panel for post-2015 will also be looking at the sustainable development goals as well. For as you know, the working group that came out of Rio +20 is also looking at that as well. So the United States would like to participate and be one of the several countries that will be on that group in particular. And we will want to look at both to what extent we, in terms of the next stage of development issues, which of the MDGs will not have been met by 2015 and how to pick up on those. What's the best balance of issues? And I think one of the things we are trying to think about in terms of the long-term is to tell the world sort of happily, how the world is different than it was in 2000, the progress that has been made, what needs to be done beyond there and recognizing the nature of global poverty is different, the location of global poverty is different. You still have poverty in lots of middle-income countries. And the mix of the different people on this planet. It is interesting to try and bring together people in communities that are looking at it, and trying to think about the development that is going on as well.

**Question:** Hi, Hilary McLellan from Deloitte Consulting. I was wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on what the UN General Assembly is going to talk about in terms of Sudan and South Sudan, and what the Assembly can hope to achieve in terms of addressing the border dispute.

**Question:** Hi, Kristin Wells with Patton Boggs, good to see you Esther.

**Brimmer:** Good to see you again.

**Question:** My question is about Rwanda and what role, what vision you think the United States has going forth during this UNGA in terms of its role in helping resolve the current dispute between Rwanda and the DRC, especially regarding the new expert support and the allegations that Rwanda has been more deeply involved in some of the atrocities of late [*Inaudible*] the position of the rebels. So if you could expand on the role there and how the US diplomatically, you think, we be handling that during the GA.

**Dawn Calabia:** Dawn Calabia, Refugees International.

**Ellis:** And member of the WFPG board.

**Calabia:** Thank you for your remarks today. My question is about UN Women. The United States played a role last time in bringing the amalgamation of several UN offices into one organization. It suffered a lot from lack of funding and support. And I'm wondering what you see the future of the US is. Would it increase its support because of the very important work the UN Women's office could do, not only in the prevention of gender-based violence—we commend the State Department and AID for their new policies in that regard—but also the very important women's empowerment, women's civil rights, women's economic rights, which is some of the things that UNIFEM used to do, which UN Women would like to do more of, but are very restricted in terms of financial support, political support and donors. Thank you.

**Brimmer:** Thank you, thank you very much for each of these questions. On Sudan and South Sudan, indeed yes, we'll be looking at the range of comments that people will make, but particularly looking at the ongoing challenges on the border—the whole picture issues and while of course there is now the Ethiopian-backed peacekeeping force, which gives another good example of what you can do with peacekeeping, which is basically helping to avert what could have been a war earlier this year and having a resumption of cross-border violence in the same way we saw unfold. There's still, of course, quite a lot of attacks and violence, but that could have escalated and been even much worse had we not had the UNISFA peacekeeping operation there. So we continue looking at trying to encourage both Sudan and South Sudan to meet their ongoing obligations—they're supposed to have the joint monitoring force should be up and running. That is not functioning as it should be, and so we'll be looking at how to try to encourage continued work in that area. Obviously continuing to follow up on the oil issues as well, that's a whole other set of packages, so I think those will be the sort of things that

member states will be looking at. As you know, there's a great deal of interest in Sudan, not just the high-level meeting next week, but year-round, a great deal of, obviously, humanitarian interest as well as the economic issues as well. And I point out, for those of you who follow peacekeeping, one in three peacekeeping dollars goes to Sudan or South Sudan in some form. If you take the cost of the operation in Darfur, the operation on the border, UNISFA, and UNMISS, which is in South Sudan, you recognize that the NDB UN community—just for peacekeeping, even before we get to the significant, significant humanitarian engagement—has invested a huge amount of time, a great deal of diplomatic energy in trying to make sure that, to try to keep Sudan and South Sudan on course. So it's an extremely important issue, which I think deserves to be taken very very seriously, but is continuing challenging.

If we turn to... it's good to see you again, and we turn to the challenge on the Democratic Republic of Congo and the relationship with Rwanda and its neighbors. As many of you know, the second largest peacekeeping operation after Darfur is MONUSCO in the DRC, and one of the most pressing challenges is along the eastern portion of the country. We deploy the outbreak of violence, we're deeply concerned about the M23 and the impact of this rebel group on the situation there. We think it's extremely important that Rwanda and all of the neighbors be actively involved in reducing the levels of violence, and we're stressing through our diplomatic channels the need for the neighbors to contribute constructively to this effort, because we very much see the alarming reports, we know that many nongovernmental organizations have reports that have come out, we know the Human Rights Watch report that came out last week. There have been many others as well. This is, I think, very serious. We have to press to make sure all the neighbors are actually trying to contribute to reducing not increasing the violence.

And then we had a question about, particularly about UN Women. And indeed, as you've already noted we've been strong supporters of UN Women and we would very much like, of course like to be making a larger contribution to UN Women. We are, of course, have deep budget constraints, as many of you who follow the budget well know. But I think that UN Women is doing very, very good work, and when we find an opportunity, even with tiny, tiny, tiny amounts of discretionary funds we try to find opportunities to support the work of UN Women. I'll just note one little footnote, I had the opportunity to join the Secretary on her trip—her pacific trip—earlier, about a month ago. And we were at the Pacific Island Forums, at the gender-based note, and she listed a series of initiatives. The first initiative she talked about was a contribution to the Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, which is a UN Women trust fund. That tiny bit was our multilateral funding, you know, it's not an amount, but we wanted to say with this little bit of discretionary funding we're going to try to support a UN Women program that was particularly relevant to the region.

**Question:** Jordie Hannum, UN Better World Campaign. Thanks for coming. I had a question, you mentioned Syria and the Commission of Inquiry, and one thing with the most recent report, they cite specific individuals within the military and the government for alleged crimes against humanity, and those could potentially be used and forwarded to the International Criminal Court. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that, what it would mean, and is the US kind of pushing there for that type of action?

**Brimmer:** Right, thank you. As you've indicated, the Commission of Inquiry, as part of the information they've collected have been able to collect names of specific individuals. They report separately from the larger report. And I think this, to have that be part of the body of information that's available for future accountability after a political transition. And we think that it's a good thing that they're trying to collect the useful information, because so often when you get to a period where you're trying to have reconciliation and accountability, the data materials are not available, or that countries coming out of crises and people coming are just trying to work out their own governments after transition don't have access to that material. So the efforts by the Commission of Inquiry and the other efforts that are going on, it's on behalf of the Syrian people, I think it's important to be able get the information now. And then the question will be, what will be the appropriate mechanism to move forward with that? Many have talked about an ICC referral, that has its own sets of challenges because the question is, you have the



countries that are not parties to the ICC. But we think that there may be, it will be a question of, it could be that there's their own process within Syria in the future. Since we don't know what that will look like, will they have their own truth and reconciliation process, will they have some other process, that's not clear yet, because so much else is not clear yet. But at least now the service that I think all of us outside can provide is helping to make sure that evidence is collected, protected, well-documented, appropriately stored and gathered for a future accountability process.

**Question:** Katherine Marshall, Georgetown University. What do you expect might be the fireworks around the meeting this year? Last year it was Palestine. Are there some landmines and...

**Brimmer:** You just want to make our lives interesting, right? [*Laughter.*] Thought it might be boring.

**Question:** What effect would you expect it might have in terms of political campaigns? Including some of the really stunning opposition that comes from some groups to the UN system, I'm curious as to how that might play.

**Question:** Cynthia Walker, UNIDO and Peacekeeping. What do you do to promote the concept in the United States of the UN as, first of all an organization not just in New York that has specialized agencies, and an organization that through economic development promotes peace? I personally was quite thrilled to see the Secretary comment, when she was talking about our ambassador, to thank those of us that had been diplomats and doing development work. And I speak to so many people in the states that have no concept of the UN as anything other than New York, and what are you doing to promote information about that and education channels?

**Ellis:** Could you hear that? I mean basically, how do you convey to the American public the value of the UN and all that the UN does? Is that fair?

**Brimmer:** Thank you for both questions. Well to some extent the fireworks are always somewhat unpredictable, so there will be something that comes up. And there will always be drama in the speeches. I mean that's one of the reasons you have the general debate, is precisely for heads of government to talk about what they see as the most important issues. Some of those are bound to be inspiring, some are bound to be inflammatory, of course there will be, and partially that's the point. That's why you have the General Assembly. It's much better for people to be throwing words at each other rather than bullets. Now, for those who have to sit through some of this that's pretty grim. And we do have views on things that we think are absolutely abhorrent. And if certain things are said that we think are truly awful we will walk out, we will walk out. That's how you express your disagreement or displeasure with that. But at least you're doing that as saying... in the debate hall and not on the battlefield. So we have to remember why we have the General Assembly. And as I say, there will be a lot we will not like, there will be a lot that we say, oh my gosh I can't believe this, or we know that we'll find unpleasant. But I think that they'll be some perennial issues. I would anticipate that the Middle East issues, in particular the Palestinian issues will be back on the agenda again this year. We have said that the real issue here is to get back to direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. That conversation has to happen directly between them in their negotiations. It's not something to take to the UN system, it's premature. But I suspect we'll probably see some of that this year.

And then in terms of, talking about... I often say, and people have heard me often say, I will use the term UN system, because we're talking about the entire United Nations system. As you know, IO itself, we have posts in multiple UN cities. And one of the things that we highlight is precisely our work across the UN system. Just to give you a reflection, my own personal interest in this area, that one of the things I try to do is have an active conversation around the country. Many of your organizations have been kind enough to host me around the country or host my colleagues when we go out and talk to the American people in different cities. So I've visited, not only do a lot of international travel, we do a lot of domestic travel as well. And one of the things we've tried to do is that, as we go to different places, is talk about the work in the UN in a way that's relevant for where we are. So this year I had the

opportunity to go to Atlanta and to spend time with the Centers for Disease Control, which is obviously a world treasure in terms of contribution to work on global health issues, but I started off a course in my public events talking about our work in the World Health Organization, and what we do in Geneva, and the contribution of CDC and the global network work on public health, and then build out to what we do on the UN system. When I was in Seattle, not surprisingly talked about the world of the protection of intellectual property, but also fostering humanitarian assistance as well, the important role of the private sector—obviously the home of the Gates Foundation. And so you try to talk about what you're doing in ways that are relevant in a particular city, but recognizing that we all have interest in the larger UN system.

**Ellis:** Okay, some other questions? I'll throw one out to you. I know a priority of this administration has been food security, and I'm wondering what you see happening at the UN now? I mean, people are talking about the fact that, you know, there's been draught, you know, a lot of people are—more and more people are starving, and how high a priority is this and what's being done about that?

**Brimmer:** Indeed, indeed. As you've already indicated, the issue of addressing food security has been a major issue for this administration and for many partners internationally. And I'll just touch on several different areas. First off, to say that we, of course, defended the continued US funding for the ambitious food security agenda—very happy to receive congressional support for continued robust funding for food security issues. Recognizing we're all in constrained times, we're trying to recognize that this is a multi-year activity and something that you have to keep supporting over time. I think it's also important to notice that indeed of course we've seen the draughts in several countries, in several, for example some of the grain-producing countries, but there have been a variety of different weather-based challenges for many producers of different food stuffs. And we think one of the things—and so it's very much a real concern. I think one of the benefits of the type of investment in international affairs, international organizations that we've seen recently has been this issue. And remember the food crisis in 2008 and the spike in food prices; they were very concerned, obviously, looking in what would be the impact now. But we think that some of the work that's been done—and I'll comment particularly on the work done with the food agencies, the UN food agencies in Rome and creating the committee on food security that brings together the three big UN agencies working on food, and there are many others as well, but that particularly focuses on obviously the FAO, WFP and IFAD—but looking at, trying to make sure you're bringing all the different resources and that you're having, in a sense, one conversation on looking at how to try to manage some of the impact of food security issues. But it is notable, if we take some of the crises that we were talking about earlier, whether it's the Sahel or Horn of Africa, that in addition to the peace and security elements and the humanitarian elements, you have a significant food security aspect as well. We're recognizing the intersection of these types of issues. So there's both a continued—there's the continued effort working on the food security issues as well. And we will see that next week at the General Assembly as well, and during the high level period as well. There'll be events related to food security and nutrition, following up very much on the work we've been doing, so that the scale of the nutrition program, which you know has been active and has had events every year, there will be an event this year as well. The US participation includes, of course, the 1,000 Days project, which you may be familiar with, which looks at the 1,000 days from pregnancy through birth to two years for nutrition, particularly for mothers and children. And so that many of the ongoing projects will be highlighted in the high-level meetings at the General Assembly as well.

**Ellis:** People always think about the General Assembly session as a time, you know it's all multilateral, but it seems to me that a lot of the value is often these regional and bilateral meetings. Could you just talk about the value of everybody being there together, and the intersection of the bilateral, regional, multilateral in terms of the value, for example to the US?

**Brimmer:** Indeed, thank you. Indeed, yes as I say, because you have a concentration of people you are able to accomplish multiple objectives and have many of the key people who are usually thousands of miles apart together. And so that you are able, on the bilateral side, for example, to meet with—whether it's the Secretary meeting with her counterparts, other foreign ministers—or a variety of other

officials, the undersecretaries, the deputy secretaries, assistant secretaries, who are all meeting with our different counterparts. And you are able to have a series of key conversations with key partners, because on so many issues you're working with key partners. But normally you'd have to fly to go see them, have video conferences, have a phone call. You're able to accomplish in a day what would take you weeks to do, and in a week what it would take you months to do. And we actually did look—because obviously we're good stewards of taxpayers' money and we're looking at the cost effectiveness—and one of the things we realized is that it's actually time and cost effective, because again, literally if you were to have the number of meetings, you would use a huge amount of time, literally flying everyone around, and a huge amount of money to bring people together. And you're able, because you're all in the same place to do in a morning quite a lot of work. Or if you have an issue where you want to talk to county X, Y, and Z about a different issue, you want to talk to each one of them, you can do that. And so it's extremely effective, and as the United States, which has worldwide interested, works with countries worldwide, this is an extremely good use of time. It's intensive to organize, but it's an extremely good use of time.

**Ellis:** Or you meet in the delegates lounge, informally.

**Brimmer:** [*Laughter.*] Yes, yes. You have a lot of coffee, a lot of coffee, a lot of coffee. And then similarly the regional groups also meet. So the different regional groups meet. The US and the European Union will talk to each other, the Arab League, the OIC, a variety of different regional groups will also have related meetings. And so that, we think—as a US official I focus my comments particularly on the US officials—but I think that diplomats from around the world find it extremely useful because they're able to make these connections and have those conversations that advance diplomacy.

**Question:** Hi, Jane Coombs, New Zealand Embassy, nice to see you Esther.

**Brimmer:** Nice to see you.

**Question:** I don't know if anybody saw Jon Stewart's interview Kofi Annan the other night, but those who didn't, he asked the question—you know, Jon Stewart asked the question—where are we on the scale between world peace and kind of panic and chaos. To which I think Kofi Annan said, we're somewhere—this is a mess, you've got to be running fast into the spectrum. So the reason I—maybe just think about the mood of the moment, Esther, and I served in the UN in the late 1980s, early 90s, which was an era of enormous hope and optimism and enthusiasm. And I sort of thought, gosh what must it be like to be serving there now, when we have this kind of sense that we're in a terrible mess? And I'd just be interested in your kind of mood check from the feet on the ground in New York, what people think can be done. I was struck by the energy in your answer about regional groups and bilateral meetings and I think that's part of the answer. But there's been a lot of questions about the ability of the UN, can it really make a difference. I mean, I know your administration is giving it its all, but how do you assist the feet on the ground? Thank you.

**Brimmer:** Thank you for the question, good to see you. A profound question, a profound question. I think I'll step back and talk about context, and then turn to the UN. I think one thing that we have to stop and say, we really do live in extraordinary times—as a blessing as opposed to a curse. That when we step back and think about the many different things that are happening simultaneously, one of them is spread of greater prosperity, greater development—there's a long way to go on the MDGs but there has been progress. You have more people with access to drinking water, you have more people in primary school, and all of those things. We also have major political change happening. We actually have the emergence, either reemergence of power—take China, 5,000 years of history, obviously taking a larger role in global affairs, and you have many other countries that are playing a larger role—and happily and almost, unfortunately, unprecedented, we have the emergence of new powers peacefully. Most countries that are taking a larger role internationally want to contribute constructively to the international system, want to be part of the international system. Maybe discussing that they want

to be members of this organization, or play a role in this area, be donors in another area, take leadership roles. But that's all happening as saying that we want to be part of one single international system. This is not a situation of a century ago where you had major revisionist powers. You're not seeing major, mass violence between sovereign states. That's something for which we should be thankful, and we do have to keep that in mind. I'm old enough, I mean, I literally, I took my PhD in 1989, so when I talk to students who look at me like, oh my gosh, the last century, I say yes, as a kid I remember the Cold War. And I grew up here in Washington, in the capital, where you talked about these things. And so recognizing, that changes... something we need to keep in mind. But then, then we step back and look at other major historical changes. And we think about the Arab Awakening, on one hand so full of hope and promise, yet at the moment we see the very battle between the forces of hope and those small but vocal and violent elements that are trying to use change for their own ends, and how that worked out is not clear yet, we don't know yet. What will be the balance between development and population, all of that I think it's a rather somber mood in New York. And I think a somber mood, at least what I see, in the posts where we work. I sense that there are tools to use to approach these issues, and we think the multilateral system is extremely central to that, but recognizing that this is not easy and no one country will have all of the answers. And that's why we go back to why it's important that we actually do talk to each other. We may disagree on what's the right next step, but the fact that we're talking to each other about it is extremely important. That's why I think the high-level meetings and the meetings we will have are part of the solution to what are some of the most complex problems we've seen in a very long time.

**Question:** Katherine Marshall again. This is a tough question, and you may not be able to answer it. But I'm mulling it over, because someone, you started out saying that this has been a very difficult week. But there was one woman who's just come from a large meeting in the Middle East, and her comment was that we've never been in as dangerous a time, and that it's the women who are seeing it on the front lines and no one's listening to them. So I'd be interested just in your reflections on, in a sense, what women bring to some of these issues beyond UN Women. And I'm mulling over still whether I think that she's over the top, but her observation was very interesting, that women are seeing and feeling some of this rage and some of the instability in ways that are not being communicated because of the problems and the barriers to women's voices that we know too well.

**Brimmer:** That's a very interesting question, and I'll comment, but I'd also invite others here to also comment, because many people I think are going to have—maybe could reflect and comment on this particular question. I do think that the point that women in many societies may be seeing different tensions that may not be always reported through formal diplomatic channels I think is probably quite true, and I'm wondering to see what other people have to say, because I think that many people—just I would also say that we're also interested in, for example, what young people are seeing, and as I get older, my definition of younger people probably changes. But I think that because we're seeing major social upheaval, societies, whether it is—I'll focus let's say on the Arab world and the Arab Awakening—but many of our societies are going through profound economic changes, going through profound political changes that mean that the world of children will be very different than the world of our parents. And so how you prepare your family to go through things—that even in societies that are stable democracies you're thinking about difficult issues and you're thinking about the future. And so, it may not always be those of us who are sitting in official positions who are aware of that, who are seeing that, who know what's happening in the conversation at the neighborhood coffee shop, down at the market, what's happening on the way as you walk out to get water, what your children are saying, because they're home with you because they don't have a job or they're home with you but really they want to move to the city and you live in the village. There are very different things happening. One of the things I often talk about in terms of interesting phenomena is urbanization. And, you know, and the fact that we're an urban people, and we've never been an urban species before. And that will continue. And that in all of our societies you're seeing mass movements from rural areas to urban areas, and that's a profound change. Again, but sometimes that's registered not only in the UN reports that I like to highlight or the World Urban Forum where we just participated and we gave an important speech and we did important work, but it's often in the family, where you say, you recognize that your family is

going to be living a thousand miles from where you are and how do you maintain the society and how do you care for your elderly people. These are very deep changes, and I think we have to be open to different ways of understanding that, different ways of talking about that. And some of that will happen in our official channels and some of that will happen outside of the official channels, so it's an interesting question. But there might be others who might be taking this on.

**Ellis:** Well, anyone is welcome to jump in. I'm just going to follow that up with a question about youth, because that is a major issue in the Middle East, it's a major issues around the world. A growing percentage of the population are below 25, they do not have jobs, some are educated and they come back and they don't have jobs. So really, what can be done about this? And then I throw in a question, as the head of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, what prospects do you see for the next Secretary General to be a woman? [*Laughter.*]

**Brimmer:** Great. Well indeed, the question of youth, as you've already identified there is a huge youth bulge in many countries, so that the number of people between 15 and 25 is particularly significant. And you have both as you say the question of where will there be jobs for people? Where will there be opportunities for them to participate in their society? Then going back to this point, they may be displaced from their families, and then without the usual cultural and structural processes that help young people become mature. I mean, it's awfully hard growing up, and if you're then in a situation where let's say you may be a young person who is now working in a factory away from your family, how do you make sure you retain your connection to your society in a sense of worth and well-being? How that happens is hard. I think looking at, I think we're trying to look at both how we work, think about our support through our development programs, how we look at support through outreach, but that this is something that is not an answer solely for governments, clearly. That the role both of societies themselves—how resilient are they, how are they able to adapt to the needs of a changing society—that's also something that needs to happen very much on a local level as well as regional, national, and international level. That's a conversation also for religious leaders, foundations, and many others as well, but I think that's extremely important.

And, to your other question, I think quite possibly. I've been happy to see that we see more opportunities for women as leaders in different parts of the UN system, and I fully hope at some point that we would see more.

**Ellis:** And also there are more women foreign ministers, there are more women ministers of defense, that's a great pathway. So, hopefully we'll see that. How about some other questions?

**Question:** My name is Jenny Ottenhof, I'm from the Center for Global Development. My question—going back to Syria a little bit, it's something getting quite a bit of attention too—and I found this discussion really interesting particularly because we've been talking about, in relation to Syria, how the UN system hasn't worked so well in terms of the way the UN Security Council has been stopped, if you will, in addressing this issue—although doing great work on the humanitarian side. I found interesting—it seems that there's kind of a parallel multilateral system that's arose from this. The kind of 'Friends of Syria' group, and there's still a lot of people trying to work multilaterally, a lot of nations trying to work multilaterally to address this. I wonder, next week—I know the 'Friends of Syria' sanctions working group I believe is meeting tomorrow—and I'm wondering next week if there's going to be more discussions on how nations—the US in particular and the leadership from the US—are going to work together to address this, if there's anything else that can be done diplomatically. Because obviously bilaterally, the kind of discussion in the US and in Congress are going in another direction, and I'm wondering, what's the discussion going to look like? Is there going to be a discussion? Maybe outside the formal UN structure?

**Question:** Just slightly off-topic, the other big meeting in town next week, the Clinton Global Initiative. I'm really curious as how that—which has now become more of an institution—how that plays within the

context of the General Assembly and what kind of role that meeting plays, particularly considering who our current Secretary of State is. [Laughter.] But what that role is.

**Brimmer:** Great, thank you. First on Syria, I would anticipate indeed that there will be a variety of conversations and meetings to look at, to continue to discuss Syria. As I mentioned, because you have so many leaders in one place that they'll probably further, so more ad hoc conversations, looking at Syria and sort of what we think the next steps will be. But there isn't a formal agenda denying in that sense, or you know there... we're not anticipating General Assembly action along that line. But no, I think there will definitely be further conversations looking at that.

And you asked me about CGI. Indeed it is actually quite exciting, because what you see is that—of course CGI, they will bring together many experts from many different fields to talk about key issues, and it really sort of compliments the effort because you have even more of a concentration of people working on international issues and I think there's a very positive relationship between them. As you know, over the years, senior administration officials have of course addressed the CGI and vice versa, so I think we see a sort of reinforcing, in the sense that you're having important global conversations. And I would note that many institutions hold events, seminars, conferences during the next two to three weeks because of the concentration of people. And so it's both the official and the unofficial types of conversations that I think really reinforce each other.

**Ellis:** Lots of schmoozing. Yes, go ahead.

**Question:** As a business person who has been attending meetings for the last 20 years [Inaudible] to the Clinton Global Initiative. You know what I see? I see the elites from Africa, from Asia, from the Arab world, from America meeting. It's those who are well off. It's those who are well established. It's those who can afford to come to New York and spend \$500 a night. I don't see the people who are coming up. I don't see young people who come from lower middle classes. That's what we need to look at.

**Ellis:** Okay, just for all of you back there. What he was saying is, his take on the Clinton Global Initiative is that it's a gathering of elites and that you don't see other groups included in that. Is that a fair rendition?

**Brimmer:** I would go back to where I started, which was—I see the meetings in New York as part of what we work on all year. And so that in New York you will see, formal diplomatic meetings and you will see a variety of meetings. One thing we're very very conscious of is that, as I say, we work across the United Nations system. And we think that one of the—some of the most interesting work is actually happening out in the field. And so that, while you will have periods where leaders will meet to talk about, give direction to, set priorities, that's got to happen, because if you don't set priorities then you won't use resources well. So that's an important part of helping shape what happens the rest of the year around the world. And so that, in addition to the high-level meetings... I mean, we're really busy in IO because this also the month of the meetings of boards of governors. We have the IAEA Board of Governors, UNICEF, UNDP, and that's all important, because again, you help set the direction for crucial organizations that then are working—doing work in the field. We also think that it's important that you to find ways precisely to have more voices participate in different activities in the UN cities—and I'm just focusing on the UN side because I work on relations with UN—but one of the things you look at is how you encourage the voices of nongovernmental organizations in the UN. The US is usually quite vocal about trying to make sure that NGOs voices are heard. Providing places where you have multi-stakeholder fora so that more voices are heard. We've also talked about the challenge—and this is a role, probably not a role for officials, but something that maybe the foundation community may want to look at or others who may contribute to this—but we're very conscious that it's very hard to have permanent representation in Geneva. There are over 40 countries that are UN members in New York and aren't in Geneva because it's too expensive. There are multiple UN cities—we were talking UNEP. UNEP, of course, is in Nairobi. If UNEP becomes a universal organization one of the important things will be, how do more members states participate—logistics alone? But we think it's a real issue, but

how do you actually have a vibrant global conversation in these different places? Because we recognize—and one of the things I say, I was just out in the Pacific region with the Secretary and one of the things we were talking to is there are many members states who want to be able to participate in conversations on the environment, on humanitarian issues, and are trying to find a way to do that. And I think trying to come up with creative solutions, which again maybe the community beyond the official community will be to say how do you do that, because you should be able to have more channels. We also are trying to use new media more effectively. So we will, as the United States we try to use more web-based activities, find more ways for people to contribute to the conversation, recognizing that you need to have access to the web and electricity for that, but that is a start. So I think trying to figure out how do we open these institutions up more to the public is a very very vital question.

**Ellis:** Well I think that's a good place to end this conversation. I just want to thank Esther so much for taking the time out of her busy schedule right before the General Assembly session, we greatly appreciate it—and for your candor and openness. Thank you for your good questions. [*Applause.*] And we wish you lots of good luck, and thank you all for coming. We hope to see you next time!