



**Embassy Series  
November 27, 2012  
Washington, DC**

**H.E. Alia Hatoug-Bouran**  
Ambassador of Jordan to the United States

***Jordan and Developments in the Region***

**Patricia Ellis:** Good evening everyone and welcome. Thank you all so much for joining us this evening for our Embassy Series event with Jordanian Ambassador to the US, Alia Hatoug Bouran, who will speak on Jordan and Developments in the Region. I am Patricia Ellis, president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, which promotes women's leadership and voices on key international issues. On behalf of the WFPG and its board members here with us tonight: Donna Constantinople and Gail Kitch, I want to thank Ambassador Hatoug-Bouran for her very warm hospitality, and for opening her embassy to WFPG members and guests.

The event tonight is part of our Embassy Series, one of our most popular types of events. Most recently we were at the British Embassy, but we have been to many different embassies, including those of several ambassadors here with us tonight—Lichtenstein and Croatia. The Women's Foreign Policy Group works closely with the diplomatic community, especially the women ambassadors, and we want to give those with us a warm welcome along with their male colleagues, and the women DCMs. We are so pleased to see many of them here with us tonight. I also wanted to mention the exciting upcoming events we have for the rest of the year, a Behind the Headlines program on Turkey's role in Syria and the Region on November 29th and an event on Women, Girls and Public Diplomacy with Tara Sonenshine, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, on December 5th.

Tonight's event on Jordan and developments in the region could not be more timely given protests in Jordan over an increase in fuel prices, the continual influx of Syrian refugees, and in the region the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, and the on-going protests in Egypt.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce you to the ambassador and moderator for this evening. Dr. Alia Hatoug-Bouran became ambassador of Jordan to the United States in 2010 and previously served as Jordan's ambassador to the UK, and ambassador to Belgium and the European Commission, Norway, and Luxembourg. In addition to her diplomatic service, she also held several government posts including Jordan's minister for tourism and antiquities and minister of environment, secretary-general of the ministry of tourism, coordinator of the international union for conservation of nature and natural resources, and chairperson of the investment committee of the economic Aqaba. Ambassador Hatoug-Bouran holds a PhD in environmental science and strategic planning and was also an associate professor of environmental science at the University of Jordan.

Elisabeth Bumiller a friend of the WFPG who has moderated several of our programs is a pentagon correspondent in the Washington bureau of the *New York Times*. She has covered numerous developments in the region, including the recent us military assistance sent to aid Jordan with the flood of Syrian refugees and to prepare for any expansion of conflict. Bumiller previously served as white house correspondent for the *New York Times* and covered the presidential campaign of John McCain. She also worked for *the Washington Post* in Washington, New Delhi, Tokyo and New York. She is also

an accomplished author of three books. We are delighted to have Elisabeth back to lead tonight's conversation with the ambassador after the ambassador speaks. Ambassador.

**Ambassador Alia Hatoug-Bouran:** I cannot thank you enough. Thank you, Patricia. Indeed I wish to thank you for this wonderful, wonderful event and I am so happy and glad that you have accepted my invitation to hold this beautiful gathering in the embassy of Jordan, and I would like to welcome each and every one of you to a piece of Jordan. I would like to welcome my colleagues, the ambassadors, the guests of Jordan and the embassy who have been here before, and those who are here for the first time. I would like to welcome you, Elisabeth, to this event and the embassy. You are a friend of Jordan and have been there several times, and I cannot thank you enough for moderating this event.

At the outset, may I introduce my staff who are here. Mr. Fawaz Bilbeisi, director of the economic affairs, Mr. Adi Khair who looks after the House, Mr. Qais Biltaji who looks after the Senate, and Dana is our communications director, as well as Ramia my assistant, who you have all met, and you have met all the staff. [*Applause.*] Thank you, to my able staff, my A-team. I am very, very fortunate to have them at the embassy.

As you can see I have not prepared anything. [*Laughter.*] But this is the best way to have a heart-to-heart and to have a closer look at the region and to look into the details that you want to look into. And what I can say at the outset is that our part of the world, and especially in Jordan, sees extremely dynamic changes almost every day. When I meet with my staff for our daily morning news, I mean every day there is something that did not happen yesterday—be it in the neighborhood, be it globally that affects us, or be it inside Jordan. But things are, the way we see it, extremely complex in terms of the different relations that govern the current Middle East and how is this going to be shaped in the future.

Two years ago when the Arab Spring started in Tunisia—and it did spread all over the Middle East—we in Jordan thought of this as a welcoming opportunity. We thought that this is a positive event, and a positive happening that is really highlighting the importance of human dignity, political intrusiveness, and openness to the different societies that we are living in. This is something that His Majesty has been speaking about, has been advocating and has been working for, I mean, for a long period of time. Not that Jordan does not have its own political structure, not that Jordan does not have its own parliament, not that Jordan does not have its own political parties—including the Muslim Brotherhood, who have been banned and underground in most of the country, in Jordan they have been legitimate since '46, they were created in '42, became legitimate in '46 and part of the parliament and part of the lower house of the government and in senior positions—not that Jordan does not have its own civil society, not that Jordan did not open up and is part of the global economy. Neither of the other facts that you could ever think of, but we have a leadership and we have a country that has invested in ourselves—in our education, in our infrastructure—that is striving for more, that wants more and that wants to have a platform so that we can be a model in the region in terms of tolerance, in terms of openness, in terms of inclusiveness, in terms of better political participation, in terms of better civil society and their say in the different and political life in Jordan.

If you have been to Jordan you know the areas and the beautiful scenery that you have been to. And I know that Ambassador of Liechtenstein, Claudia—dear Claudia—has been to Jordan recently and has seen the beautiful monuments. This is a testament. If you are in Jordan, you will see that Jordan is the crater of civilization, in terms of it is a melting pot. You will see the Nabataeans, you will see the Omanians, you will see the Byzantines—all of this, you find in small Jordan. What does it say? It says a lot—it says about the tolerance, about the coexistence, it says about the future that Jordan has. We are very, very proud of our deep-rooted Muslim culture. This culture and this is a foundation for the future. We see ourselves looking at the future with solid grounds that are based on Muslim culture and the Arab genuine characteristics that any person would find in any Jordanian if you are in Jordan.

When asked, what is the impression that you have when you leave Jordan, people would say the people. And this is very, very, very true. Wherever you go there is this huge hospitality, there is this huge warmth that you see in our country. I must say also here, that as ambassador—I am not only saying this because I am an ambassador at an embassy here in Washington—but the warmth and the genuine relationship that we have here with the United States is exemplary. I push on open doors. I see the warmth and the strategic relationship that governs Jordan with the United States for the past sixty years—sixty-two years. I am very proud of this relationship and I know that I know that it is going to prosper for many, many decades and centuries to come.

There are lots of things that we can speak about. I am a strong believer of conversation and to be able to engage. I am sure that we are going to touch on all of that. And if you would like we can look at the scene in Jordan, we can go to Syria, we can go to Iraq, we can do the whole scene. We can do the recent developments in Gaza between Hamas and Israel. We can look at the day after tomorrow in the United Nations, look at all the global matters that happen.

I would want to just say thank you so much, and probably start with the engagement so that maybe we will have some kind of dialogue, if that is fine with you. *[Applause.]*

**Elisabeth Bumiller:** Well thank you very much. What I am going to do is just—thank you very much for agreeing to do this, for having all of us here. I am going to start off with about 15 or 20 minutes of questions from me, and then I am going to open it up to the floor, and usually Pat likes to ask the first of the questions from the floor. It's her prerogative. *[Laughter.]* So I will start.

So I think after that warm welcome I will ask you a hard question, which is, as you know better than any of us, you know there have been very violent protests in Jordan recently over gas prices. There has been a lot of anger at the king over what is seen as deep-seeded corruption in the political ruling class. There were 157 protestors who were arrested on November 13th, one was killed, etc. Now Jordan—as you just said—we all know, is one of America's most important allies in the Middle East, long-time allies. And there is concern, is Jordan another Tunisia? Is it going the way of other countries in the Arab Spring?

**Bouran:** Thank you Elisabeth, and thank you for this question. What you have seen in terms of the protests and on the streets of Amman is very correct, it is very true. I mean, it's not that I am an ambassador trying to say, no, no no, this is all fabrication or this and that. No, there were protests, there were people also who demonstrated—rightfully so—because they were angry at the lifting of the subsidies that the government had to do and had to make. And this is all of course extremely, extremely painful measures that any government would do, of course, it is going to have its own repercussion on the streets. But we are not alone in this. If you look worldwide, if you look at Europe, if you look at the whole, big economic marketplaces, you will see that people and government have to take some of the measures that are extremely, extremely difficult.

Now the protests that we see on the streets are very much because Jordan is a country that has freedom of expression—and to be able to go out on the streets and demonstrate and banners and what have you—this is part of the constitution and this is part of the freedom of speech that is very much engaging for each and every Jordanian. But unfortunately, that alongside those peaceful demonstrations, there were those that took advantage of the peaceful demonstrations that you see on the streets of Amman. They started to set fire to some of the institutions, they started to set fire to some of the private and public properties. And this is something that nobody tolerates, Elisabeth. Not Jordan, not any country in the world. Now what happened is that what you have seen for the last day and a half in Jordan—and I am very honest and candid about it. I am a strong believer of putting all the facts on the table. The thing is that the police is unarmed—totally unarmed—and the shooting that happened to this gentleman was not by the police at all. On the contrary, our police has been fired at by some of the people that we do not know. For the last two years since the Arab Spring started, we had on our streets

more than 7,000 demonstrations. Not a single shot was fired. I mean I am 100% sure of that. All the time the police would go unarmed—they are still unarmed—they go with the demonstrators to protect them whilst they are doing their demonstrations. But unfortunately, during the last protest some people, they just, as I said, took advantage of the peaceful protest and tried to put fire and what have you.

Now, the turning point was that Jordanians rejected that. People, the civil society, young people rejected that. Symbolically, the youth would go out towards institutions, banks, and what have you, and they would make a chain saying, do not harm those institutions, they have nothing to do with the lifting of the subsidies. This is of course symbolic, the police is there. But it gave a very positive message about the ownership, about the fact that this is something that is ours, we do not have to sabotage something that has nothing to do with the lifting of the prices. If you have something to do, this is a demonstration, you can. If you want something, write it down. Vandalism did not and will not ever do good. Now, this lasted for a day and a half, and then the usual demonstrations that we see on the streets of Amman continued. His Majesty has been engaging, the government has been engaging, the prime minister and different ministers were out on the media communicating and doing round tables and town halls, and His Majesty was marching door to door to villages and other small villages making sure that the connection is there in terms of people understanding why did we do that.

Many people would ask, why do you have to do it now? I mean, it is the beginning of the winter, it is not the right time, and people feel extremely angry about it and they are absolutely right. What we have been saying—and it is there and published—Jordan has been going through extremely difficult economic times because of two things. We import 96% of our oil and gas from outside. We buy the fuel from the marketplace and it is, of course, extremely expensive. Plus add to that, that the interruption of the Egyptian gas that is used to feed the government, used to feed Jordan, has been interrupted for the past year and a half. The gas pipeline which goes through Sinai and then it forks, one part goes to Jordan and the other part goes to Israel, has been bombed 15 times. Every time it is interrupted it costs the government \$5 million a day. In a year and a half it is \$2.7 billion. Amazing numbers! We had to go the IMF to borrow some money and to come up with an internal, sort of economic package for Jordan. But one of the most important things that we need to do is to correct, internally, some of the problems that matter to Jordanians, which is to lift the subsidy on some of the commodities, and this is what we had to do.

**Bumiller:** So just to follow-up very briefly then, what do you expect the future to bring—the next year, the next six months? Do you anticipate more protests or do you think the government will be able to settle things down? What do you think?

**Bouran:** Well I think that we don't mind the protests. We don't mind. We have seen the protests, I mean, it's not just when the Arab Spring we had the protests in Amman. There is always something that people are protesting about. Either it has to do with healthcare or it has to do with this and that, which is very much fine. This is something that you see on the streets of Amman. Of course, it got more after the Arab Spring and we see that. But the thing is that, the private sector is working, the investment climate has not been hit, tourism is there. We had one of our highest numbers in the spring for tourism, because people know this is something that is happening every week. Every Friday, you can see this on the streets of Amman, for an hour or two, and then people go back to their businesses. So this is a cycle, we have been living this for the past two years. Now if you are in Amman, you will be witnessing a very healthy debate about the future of the political context and the political structure in Jordan. We have our elections on the 23rd of January, and the next government is going to be from parliament. It is going to be a parliamentary government to harness and to make sure that it governs all the political parties and it looks for a more inclusive political Jordan.

**Bumiller:** Okay, thank you. Let me move to another topic, which is Gaza. Jordan, as you know, has a very large restive Palestinian population. So how is the Gaza conflict seen in Jordan? Do the

Palestinians side with Hamas or with Mahmoud Abbas? And how do you anticipate the future of that playing out?

**Bouran:** You know the Arab-Israeli conflict, and especially the matter between Israelis and Palestinians, has been the core matter for Jordanian foreign policy. Wherever we are, wherever His Majesty, wherever the prime minister, wherever the ambassadors are speaking and looking at different matters, we always say unless this thing is resolved, unless the conflict is resolved then we believe that this is a conflict that is going to feed itself, and the cycle of violence is just going to expand more and more. There is a solution on the table. There is the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-state solution. It has been on the table since 2002. It has been reiterated in the different Arab League conferences and it has never been ever withdrawn from the table by the Arab League. Jordan is in a situation whereby we are able to pick up the phone and call Mahmoud Abbas or call the Israeli government and say, you know what, this thing you have been doing in terms of so and so is not helping, it is not serving the right, it is not serving the region, or, what you are doing in that area is really harmful or something that is positive. I mean, this is the unique situation that we find ourselves in—that we are able to outreach and communicate with our neighbors. And when things become really tough we open up our doors for the explanatory talks that, you know, we have hosted at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a couple of months ago, whereby the talks resume after it has been stopped for almost six months. It's extremely important that the negotiations keep going between the Palestinians and the Israelis. And what we see is the only solution on the table is the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative.

On Gaza, we are often asked. But look what happened in Gaza. Look what happened in the south of Lebanon. When the Israelis pulled out it was filled up by a vacuum and then more radical groups stepped in. It is absolutely true. One hundred percent true. But we counterargument and say, the Israelis have withdrawn from those lands without negotiations, at all. It's just the army pulled out, and of course the vacuum was created, and of course there is a radical group that has stepped in, in the form of Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon and in the form of Hamas in the south bank. So this is something that is anticipated, this is something that happens worldwide, and this is, of course, this is going to happen. Look at the treaty between Israel and Egypt. Look at the treaty between Israel and Jordan. It is a negotiated settlement, it is a negotiated treaty. Everybody knows the boundaries and everybody knows what they have or what they do not have. This is why negotiations are the only way and the only solution forward.

**Bumiller:** Just a brief follow-up on this topic. Has President Obama—your friend, President Obama—abdicated playing a role in that negotiated peace, as some of his critics say, or just stepping back from the Middle East?

**Bouran:** On the contrary, I think that what the president has done since he assumed presidency the first time was an amazing outreach to the Arab and Muslim world. It really had its impact on the different streets of the Arab world. You can see that there is a kind of connect between the people, that this is a president that is doing the outreach, that the United States is ready to listen, that the United States wants to have the people of the region have a chance to have their own dignity and to have their own aspirations. When we speak about the Palestinians, we are speaking about occupation. We are in the 21st century and we are still talking about occupation. I mean, nobody accepts that.

At the same time the Palestinians are divided, and there is also the radical groups that do not think about peace. They do think about the context of a peaceful resolution that is not harmful for the Israelis. What we want to see, honestly, is a Middle East that has the two-state solution. The Palestinian state living side-by-side with secure Israel, that the Israelis are part of the parcel of the region, they are part of the parcel of the economy, of the people's engagement. When you look at the potential of peace in the future, when you look at the future of the energy projects that we could work all together, when you look at the potential of communication, infrastructure—the sky is the limit. And that's why the dividends of peace are extremely, extremely lucrative in terms of peace of mind, in terms of people getting their

businesses together for a prosperous Middle East. This is why we inject hope all the time, because there is, anyway, too much negativity without that, but it is important to have the country that will say, no you can do it, it is important that you do it, let's do it this way, let's do it that way, if this doesn't work how about this third way. So this is a country that is in the middle of everything that is happening in the Middle East, but we are—thank god—in a good position, a wonderful position where we can speak to our neighbors and be absolutely candid and honest when it comes to the future of the Middle East.

**Bumiller:** Now I am going to ask you a military question. We have a huge refugee crisis on your borders, from Syria, and I wrote a story earlier this fall that there were 150 secret—not so secret now—150 American military planners outside of Amman working with the Jordanian military on helping with the refugee crisis and for plans for the region should there be an outbreak of bigger violence. And there was talk at the time of creating a buffer zone between Jordan and Syria which could be enforced by Jordanian forces on the Syrian side of the border and I was just curious how far along that was in discussions. I mean, that is a big step.

**Bouran:** Well in my remarks I said that everything that happens around us, you can see it on the streets of Amman. Of course our own internal matters are on our streets, plus what is happening around us. When the war in Iraq, you could see the demonstrations on the streets of Amman every day, every Friday, every day that has to do with Iraq and the war and what have you. When there is in Gaza and between the Palestinians and Israelis you see demonstrations in Amman at the time. That's why, Elisabeth, I was saying that the demonstrations are part of our political life as well. This is something that we have to have seen so many times, and it is an expression and it is a right at the end of the day.

If you are in the northern part of Jordan—and you have been there—you will see a camp called Zaatari. This is a refugee camp that holds something like 50,000 Syrian refugees. The capacity of this camp is 80,000. The overall refugee numbers—the Syrian refugees in Jordan—is around 200,000. And do you think the Iraqi refugees have left, all the Iraqis? No they haven't. We host 13 Palestinian camps. We had, at one point, between 600,000 to 700,000 Iraqis in Jordan. And now you see around 200,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan. And those are not our numbers, those are the UN numbers and those are the numbers of international organizations. If you step in one of our schools you will see Jordanian kids sitting side-by-side Iraqi kids, sitting side-by-side Syrian kids. We have just now incorporated 17,000 Syrian children into our schools because they are of school age. What do we do with a generation that is growing up and that needs schooling? And we have one of the best schooling systems in the Middle East, and that was a decision by His Majesty to incorporate all.

Now the worry is multiple, from Syria. The worry, as you know, goes as follows. It has to do with the chemical and biological weapons that they have. And they have announced it and they have said we have it here, we have it there and we have it there. The other worry is the spillover of the violence to the different countries including Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey. There is another worry that has to do with some of the people that have a political residence with the Syrian regime like Iran and Hezbollah. And so the complexity of the region and the complexity of the situation in Syria makes it extremely, extremely—I would say for us—extremely careful to look at what will happen to Syria the next day after the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Of course we look at the Free Syrian Army, of course we have seen what happened in Doha and now there is an umbrella organization and that sort of unites the opposition. We see this, but we also see what happened in Libya, and we have also seen what happens to the weaponry there. And we have seen—there are some reports, maybe you know better than me—in terms that some of the weapons in Libya have been smuggled here and there and it has reached to Hamas' hand. There are some stories and some of the reports that are suggesting that, we don't know. But what we know is after the aftermath and after the second day, there are lots of questions that need to be answered. One of them is the composition of the fighters. Who are they? Because we see some of the caliber characters that are there. I mean, they try to smuggle themselves through our borders and they are not Jordanians, they are not Syrians, they come from other parts of the world that we are extremely careful about. And we would want to have a careful political analysis on what is happening in Syria, right now and the day after. It is extremely important.

**Bumiller:** Just one follow-up and then I will turn it over to the audience. So just is there any attempt to control your border in some way, to keep these fighters you described from coming through? And what would that attempt be, practically speaking?

**Bouran:** Well we—thank god—have a very, very able army. We have extremely able different security apparatuses that have their eyes wide open. We have also extremely important collaboration with lots of our friends and allies when it comes to securing our borders. It is of national interest. This is extremely important and we cannot afford to have our borders secured.

**Bumiller:** Okay, we will follow-up more with that later. Pat?

**Ellis:** I would like to ask two questions, one relates to the economy and one relates to your neighbors. And the first one is, if the economy is in dire straits—and you have had these protests—what is in the works that might help improve this? Because you have the Syrian refugee crisis, which could—even despite aid from UN agencies—which is another drain on the economy. You have a very large youth population. So I am wondering if you can address that. And the other question is, when you look around your neighborhood and you see what's going on, for example in Egypt and other countries, what kinds of lessons are there for you? It was just announced that there will be meetings between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood and so how do you see these things playing out? Obviously you are a different country, but you are in the neighborhood. So I was wondering if you could address those two.

**Bouran:** Thank you so much for your questions. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much for the question. Actually one of the biggest challenges for us in the Arab World is to address the matter of the youth, and to address the future of the youth. I am saying this because, you know, my country has invested in quality education. We have invested in education to a point where it is part and parcel of our knowledge economy. It is something that we are extremely, extremely proud of. The thing is that with the rapid population growth, and with the different economic crises, and with the different political crises around us as well, it made the sometimes economy get a little bit slower. And so finding a job, as everywhere else in the world, has become extremely difficult. There is a cultural pattern that existed in Jordan for quite some time that is changing right now, but it had to do with the fact that many would like to join the government. They would like to join the army. They would like to join the different governmental institutions. You find this in many parts of our part of the world. But this is a trend that no longer can be attractive for the youth, because governments are no longer able to employ. Unfortunately the private sector—not only in Jordan, but worldwide—did not grow fast enough to be able to employ and diversify. So that is why there is a gap between the quality education, the youth that are graduating, but they are not finding jobs. So the most important thing, and what we have done, is through different initiative, first of all to make the environment in terms of Jordan extremely comfortable for the different investors. We are looking at investment in a way that is extremely, extremely positive and beneficial for Jordan. We have looked at the laws. We have looked at the different measures so that we can attract attention to Jordan, and we have lots of projects that we are advocating worldwide when it comes to investing in Jordan. And we have the different parameters and the different legal and banking systems that is extremely appealing for investments. We are doing very well on that front, actually.

Now, because this is a very youthful population, another thing that we have worked on—and this is thanks to Her Majesty Queen Rania—is initiatives with the youth and small medium enterprises [SMEs]. So this is part of the future of Jordan. You invest in yourself with education, you invest in your small business. We have been working with you, with the United States, and lots of our friends in Europe to make this a positive sort of feedback package in Jordan, whereby people go to the banks within a program that we have been working on and they get their loans and they do their small business. And they start small but they grow with the growth of the program. It has been successful.

Fawaz, can you comment on the success of the small and medium?

**Fawaz Bilbeisi:** Well I am afraid that is all the time we have tonight. [*Laughter.*] Actually, if you would just allow me to come back a little bit before that, between 2000 and 2008 when really the government and private sector in Jordan were focusing on mega-projects. Everyone was talking about mega-projects, mega-projects. And we did that because we wanted to modernize and expand our infrastructure so that we can maintain our competitiveness in the region. Jordan considers itself—and it is a reality—a gateway for business in the region, especially in services, high tech businesses, and so forth. And so we did invest a lot in infrastructure to maintain this competitiveness. But after 2008, and actually with the early signs of the global economy slowdown, we started to look into—or focusing more onto—SMEs, because the government was not able to provide the jobs for the people like before and there was a real strong urge on the part of the young people to have their own businesses. So we started working on the small and medium enterprises. One of the highlights of the US-Jordan economic relationship is this project that was developed, OPEC, Overseas Private Economic Corporation, by which the US government provided loan guarantees for small and medium enterprises in Jordan, and only based on the merits of the projects. So instead of having collateral or having the guarantees to take a loan, they would study the project of the young man or woman and based on this they would give them the merits of the loan. And then if that company cannot pay back this loan, the loan will be guaranteed by the US government. And that came up because there was a lot of liquidity in the banks of Jordan, but because of the banking system in Jordan they were not able to release all this liquidity for the small companies, for the start-ups, for entrepreneurs. And you know the project started last year, or early this year actually, and has been working very well. From what I heard the feedback is really good. Of course, in addition to that program there are many programs that are either funded by the government of Jordan or funded by the private sector, in order to encourage more entrepreneurship, more small businesses to start and thrive.

**Bumiller:** Okay, anyone else have a question?

**Question:** Hi, I'm Laura Hagg with the International City/County Management Association, and I was fortunate enough to live and work in Jordan in 2008 and 2009. I have a local government background here in the US, and what was interesting, as I remember reading in the Jordan Times—it was either 2008 or 2009—where there was talk of decentralization and King Abdullah doing some reforms. And in particular, they had done some exercises in Madaba about decision-making at the local government level. But from when I try to keep up and follow, it seems that efforts have stalled, so I didn't know if you could speak to some of the challenges or maybe more things that are going on that I'm not aware of. But what are the challenges of decentralization there in Jordan?

**Bouran:** No, that's absolutely—this is, again, one of the central issues that His Majesty and the government are working on. Decentralization, it takes time, though. It takes time. And this is something that we have started, I think, three or four years ago, whereby each and every region in Jordan would decide for themselves what kind of developmental options they would have. What kind of competitive niches they are famous for—be it agriculture, be tourism, be it small businesses, be it banking, what have you. So this is part of re-looking, re-launching, and injecting some of the ideas and initiatives that we think that is going to boost the economy, and make sure that we are moving in the right direction. Jordan is a small country with beautiful ideas, initiatives. You find people that are business-driven, you find women that are in high positions, you find bankers, you find the tourism sector is thriving, you find us in pharmaceuticals—this is one of the most important sectors, engines of growth, when you look at them, it is our pharmaceuticals have been world-wide and famous. And we are able to think and create and move forward.

The thing is that, you know—I don't want to say it's a combination, but sometimes it is this combination of internal/external factors that sometimes would slow some of the fast-forward issues that we are working on, and it makes us look at what's happening in Gaza, what's happening with the refugee



camps. With the little resources that we have, we are sharing it with the Syrian refugees, we are sharing it with the Iraqis when they came to Jordan. And just to give you an idea, the camp that we have built in the north of Jordan—the Zaatari camp—I mean, it's as I say, hosting now up to 50,000 refugees. And what we are saying to the whole world is, we have opened our borders and we have the humanitarian aspect—that the Hashemites and His Majesty in the government—is second to none in terms of, you know people seek your help and seek your shelter, and of course as a country you open up your arms. But we are saying too to the international community, please help us, help the refugees. And that's why Jordan and six UN agencies have launched an appeal to say to the international community, this is what the camp needs, these are the needs of the children, these are the needs of the old and the women and what have you. And can you imagine that out of this UN-Jordan appeal only 7% of what is needed is met—only 7%.

**Question:** I'm Melissa Mahle, C&O Resources, and thank you very much. I'd like to go back to the Middle East peace process, if we can. This past week we have had a flare of fighting in Gaza, where Hamas is trying to achieve its political goals through military means. And then this week President Abbas is heading to the UN to seek a change of status of the Palestinians, and the U.S. opposes that. And so I was wondering if you could speak to the Jordanian position and on why you support Abbas' initiative, and to maybe talk about a little bit how to move forward from that, because we're certainly hearing some dire warnings that the Palestinians about punishment and so on.

**Bouran:** Yeah, we have heard the same thing. I mean, we work well with different government agencies here—with the, of course, with the administration and we are on the Hill. We have here two able diplomats that cover the Congress, and the House and the Senate, and we know this very well, because we heard it from the different senior people over there. I mean, this is exactly what we have been advocating all our lives—that if it's a piecemeal approach, this is going to stay for a very long period of time. And the more it stays like this, the cycle of violence is going to widen, more people are going to get radicalized, I mean more people—the sensible people—are going to be pushed to the side. And this is the image of the Middle East, unfortunately. That we are going to—if there is not comprehensive peace that looks on all issues, that looks at borders, that looks at security, that looks at refugees, that looks at water, that looks at every angle that you can think of in the Oslo Agreement—if this is not tackled then it is going to stay, and maybe more violent and more destructive and it will get more radicalized.

I would like to emphasize a point here, if I may Elisabeth, and thank you so much for this question, because it really touches the core issue when it comes to the foreign policy of Jordan. When we invite the Palestinians and the Israelis to Jordan to have the exploratory talks, when we are there brokering the agreements and working with the Israelis and the Palestinians separately and then bringing them together, and working with you, with our partners in Europe, and with the EU and everyone—this is not because Jordan is just a broker. It's not just because Jordan would like—it's not for the photo-op, absolutely. We do it because it has to do with our own strategic interest that we have to have peace in the region. We have to have a two-state solution, we have to have a Palestinian state, as I said, that lives side-by-side a secure Israel. This is part of our own national interest, because of the complexity of the region and the complexity of the different elements that it entails. The final status negotiations—Jordan is very much there. It has to be there. How can you speak about refugees and Jordan is not there on the table? How are you going to tackle the issue of Jerusalem when we are not there? How are you going to talk about borders when, in the future plans that we would like to push forward and say this is something that we should all of us work for, there are three parts that touch our borders as well. When it comes to water resources, for example, this is something that we need to be there as well, and so on and so forth. So this is an interest, a national interest of Jordan that would want to see the stability, that wants to see the two-state solution. The piecemeal approach—there is a ceasefire here, and it's... of course, the violence we are very much—we have field hospitals everywhere—but at the end of the day it has to have this comprehensive approach to a lasting peace. And it has to be a comprehensive lasting peace, believe me. If not, then societies are going to get more radicalized, it's

going to be more of the negativity in the Middle East, and this is going to keep going on and on, and people will just shy away from the whole thing and say, you know what, this is so complicated, I don't know if I want even to have anything to do with the whole region as far as the potential, and the future is just amazing.

**Question:** Marcia Wiss, I'm a partner in Hogan Lovells and a professor at Georgetown and SAIS. I have a question that's archeological and cultural. Surrounded by the pictures of Petra—I was at one of the Smithsonian museums recently, and the Saudis have an exhibit about their culture and traditions and archeology, and the Nabataeans are quite prominent in that. And it struck me as I was looking at it that Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have many common aspects—historical through the Nabataeans, they're both monarchies—and yet, there are also many differences. Cultural differences in terms of the way women are treated, in the way democracy operates—obviously oil probably plays a part in that. But I'd be interested in your thoughts in—I don't want to get into borders—but your thoughts on the reason for some of these differences despite the historic commonality.

**Bouran:** [*Sigh.*] [*Laughter.*] When you are invited by the Saudi ambassador please take me with you. [*Laughter.*] No amazing, amazing. Thank you for mentioning Petra, thank you for mentioning—I mean, I remember the first time ever we have hosted the interfaith dialogue in Jordan. That was 35 years ago. People haven't heard of the difference of cultures and civilizations, or the famous or infamous theories and books and clashes or what have you that have evolved after September 11th. But, I mean, we are strong believers of the fact that tolerance and coexistence and the interfaith, and when it comes to understanding each other, is one of the strongest properties of the human property. And one of the things that I was saying to my government and to lots of people when I was ambassador in Brussels, that one of the venues between the Euro partnership agreements that we had after the peace treaty, that it looked at different angles—it looked at the economic, political, as well as the cultural, as well as the social. And I said to myself, it's such a pity that during all those years everybody—I mean the two shores of the Mediterranean—have focused on the political, financial, economic, and opening up the economies and what have you. And the third basket, or the third important venue of cooperation, that rotated around the social as well as the cultural matters was somehow either not that important or nobody paid that much attention to it or not so many people attended the meetings that happened around that. And it proved to be, in my belief, one of the most important aspects of cooperation, at that time, between Europe and the Mediterranean. And you can take this example, between the Middle East and the United States, or between the Middle East and Asia, and the rest of the world. I think you have rightfully said, I mean if there is no connect between the different people and between the different civilizations—be it Nabataeans, be it any kind of different civilization that we have seen in Jordan—I mean you lose the essence of it. You lose the fact that it all becomes too much commercialized, too much—it's sort of day-to-day and it doesn't have that beautiful cultural and social weight that makes it so beautiful and so human. And that is why we are very proud—all of us, I mean—when you visit Jordan and somebody asks you, have you enjoyed yourself? Have you seen this? Have you seen that? The big malls, and what have you. People say, no, no, no, this we have seen everywhere in the world. We want to go and see this. We want to go up the stairs to Petra and see the beautiful scenery from there. Or we want to talk to the Bedouins, or talk to the camps, or talk to the people. And this is what makes it original. This is what makes it beautiful. The second part of your question, I don't know.

**Bumiller:** Okay, these four since your hands are up. And just ask them boom, boom, boom and then you have to remember them or I'll take notes and remember them for you.

**Ambassador Claudia Fritsche:** Maybe for this audience it would be of particular interest if you were kind enough, Ambassador, to tell us a little bit about the situation with women and girls in Jordan. About equal opportunity, about the situation in the workplace, representation on a political level, and whether the trends that we see many—at least in some regions of the world—where female students outnumber male students at universities, is that a trend in Jordan?

**Question:** Cheryl Gordon, DCM from the Embassy of Jamaica. I just wanted to know from Jordan's position as a broker in the Middle East, where you see the conference on a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, which will actually be held in December, where you see that going?

**Question:** I am Eileen Shields-West and I chair Refugees International, a group that has been in your country recently. And you know the whole world thanks you for being a host country to so many refugees. My question is, are there any circumstances which would require or compel you to close the border with Syria because of the impact on your country?

**Donna Constantinople:** Yes and mine is a little bit related. Donna Constantinople and I'm on the board of Women's Foreign Policy Group. And that is that it seems as though what you described as the unrest related to the economics in your country, and then couple with what is going on in Gaza, and what is going on with the growing refugee problem, coming right now from Syria. At what point do you see a breaking point that you would need to signal to the Obama administration that this is not tenable. And as someone who has always served as a broker, this is worrying to listen to. And I wanted to see where you are on the scale of the breaking point do you feel you are now, how soon would it get untenable?

**Bouran:** Thank you Ambassador, thank you dear Claudia for your question. I think we need to do more on women's representation. I think that Jordan is one of the, I believe, one of the leading countries in the region when it comes to women in the workplace, and women in government, or women in the private sector, but we are ambitious. We are very ambitious. We are small, but extremely ambitious, and we would like to see more women have leading places and roles within the government, within embassies, within the parliament as well. In the political life, we have the quota systems so far, which you see it in many of the Arab countries. And this is fine for now. I was one of the people who asked lots of questions when it came to the representation of women in parliament through a quota, but I think this is a good way to include women in the political process. Whereby, because of the different cultural matters that we have in Jordan, people will be able to have a positive look at the role of women inside parliament. And we can phase out, as long as this is something that is temporary, as long as this is a measure that we have to take in order to bring more awareness to how women are able to do business in terms of parliament and political life and in parties, then this is an okay procedure and measure.

In the private sector I think women are doing excellent. When it comes to equal partnership we are doing extremely well, and we get lots of international marks when it comes to women's participation, especially in the private sector. And we need to do more encouragement in the political life. As I said, after the elections, and now, you see many of the women are running for elections and they are forming different parties so that they can have a say in the political and the future life of Jordan, which is extremely important. And this is healthy, and this is extremely helpful. I hope that at the next elections we will see many women in our parliament. But is it enough for our own ambitions? Of course not, we need more and we are working for that.

Probably the two questions that have to do with the Syrian refugees, I would call what is happening on the streets of Amman, it is continuous demonstrations—I would not call it unrest. I wouldn't call it unrest. I would call it demonstrations that have been—if I may—hijacked by the different groups that did harm to some of the public and private properties for a short period of time, and then it subsided. So we are back to the orderly demonstrations that we see every day, that we see every Friday, which we have seen in the past years in and in the past ten years for that matter.

We have a leadership and we have a king that have always believed in the fact that if your neighbor—and this is out of the Hashemite legacy and the Hashemite roots of being in Jordan—whereby when you have a neighbor in distress and comes to you, you open your borders for that. And god knows that many of our neighbors at the time of the Iraqi war, many closed their borders and we had, long time ago, to host something like 700,000 to 800,000 Iraqi refugees. Of course, not all of them were in the

situation that we see with the Syrian refugees. Of course, many of them were extremely wealthy, they have invested in Jordan, and they have done themselves good as well as the Jordanian economy. But the majority were not of that status, and you see them also in Amman. I don't believe, I don't think, at least now, that there is any possibility for us to close the borders with Syria. Because the influx of refugees—and if you go to Jordan and you see the camp, you will see exactly what I am talking about—the humanitarian crisis that you see in Syria is unprecedented. Families with children being shot in the back. I mean, how would you close a border in front of a family that has been shot in the back, and what would you do? So there is no tipping point. We do not calculate this way. We do not say this is a measure that we have to do, it is just our culture, this is the Hashemite legacy of His Majesty, and this is something that we have done a long time ago. We share with those refugees what we have, and we appeal for the international community and for the United States to be able to help.

Having said that, I must say that you have been an amazing help for Jordan. So I want to thank the United States time and again for their enormous, enormous help and support that you have given us—be it on the economic level, be it on the financial level, be it on advice when it comes to the different democratic measures. We work well with the NDI [National Democratic Institute], we work well with the IRI [International Republican Institute], and we have opened all of our institutions for better political practices. And we say to the different democracy groups that are in Jordan right now, we want to learn. This is a young country with a young experience, and we want to learn from you. And we want to see how the different countries have reached to wherever they have reached to, which is amazing. And the model of the United States is something that we feel is extremely, extremely dear to us. We value this a lot, because we know the principles and the values that you come out with. But we also say to our friends—the different democracy groups and the different organizations—you also have to understand the Jordanian political life. You have also to understand the political implications that we live in. This is not an island somewhere there that is not impacted by what is happening around us. This is not an isolated country that just looks at its own issues. We have been engaging, we have positive impact, we have positive feedback, and we will continue to play that role in the region, and we will continue to play that role in the region for as much as it takes.

For the nuclear, we are signatories to the agreement, to the international agreement on the free zone in the Middle East, because we believe that it should apply to all countries. It really should apply to all countries, I mean the use of nuclear for military use. Having said that, we are a country that is building our own civil, peaceful nuclear reactors for desalination purposes and for the production of the electricity. And we are in negotiations with the United States. We had a negotiation with many countries in Europe, and we have signed 13 agreements with 13 countries on that issue, because we want to have the best technology and the best lessons learned when it comes to the civil use of nuclear energy. We are in bad need for it because we need it to desalinate, we need energy and we are looking into this form out of different options that we are looking at for our own Jordanian use.

Thank you.

**Bumiller:** Thank you very much. With that, thank you to the audience, thank you to the Ambassador for a very enlightening evening. [*Applause.*]