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COMMISSIONER YOUNG: Now, we will have the opportunity over the next few minutes of hearing from three different speakers, and let me start with the first, whom we are absolutely delighted and honored to have with us today.

We have His Excellency, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Karimi, who is with us heading the delegation from Afghanistan. He has had a distinguished legal career outlined in your materials, and I won't repeat that other than to say that it is a great opportunity for us to have him with us today and invite him to speak to the group at this point.

[Applause.]

MINISTER KARIMI [Interpreted from Persian]: In the name of God, the merciful, compassionate, first of all, I would like to express thanks for the Religious Freedom Commission which has prepared and convened such an occasion. We are satisfied from what has been said and the way the discussions went ahead. On behalf of the Cabinet of Afghanistan, I would like to express thanks for the assistance which is extended to us from the United States and other members of the international community.

This time is short. I would like to go into detail and talk about political matters. There are certain aspects which has been discussed this morning. I would refer to them and make certain points.

I would like to say, until we make or establish principles, we cannot talk about other matters which is relevant to that principles. In other words, principles are more important than subsidiary things. There is no difference or, another word, there is no contradiction between religion and science. Obviously, there is some problem, there is some differences, and we got to the understanding of the religion and understanding of science.

The understanding of religion is not the religion itself. In understanding the religion, there can be mistakes and misunderstandings. When we analyze religion, there is a possibility of mistake, and it is a possibility of understanding it correctly. So, in that regard, it will be consistent, and in that way, we can channel out and thorough understanding of matters.

When we talk about understanding in regard to education, in regard to the religion, we can talk about three aspects of it. To understand religion from inside of it, from outside of it--not three things--from outside and from inside the understanding of religion.

The problem with understanding of religion in the Middle Ages, when they got to the religion, was that they wanted to know or they knew or they let the people to know the internal matters of religion. They won't allow the people to know the outside of it, external aspect of it.

At that time, in Europe, when the people started wanting to understand the religion, the Catholic society would not accept that. Because of this, what happened, the result of it, was that the religion, as a whole, was thrown out. And then, of course, there was the science of the religion, a type of [inaudible] occurred, which in fact they tried to understand religion through scientific, through analysis of what is going on, without the interference of the priests and the rest.

As far as religion is concerned, anyway we've got no problem. Understanding it there is a problem. Some people, obviously, they interpret things so rigidly and so restrictively that this causes problem. But if you go out of it and broadly interpret that, then there will be no problem in that.

If we understand religion scientifically, then a gate will be opened for the understanding of science, technology, and there is room for it, to utilize that and benefit from it. Some people may wonder when we're talking about understanding of religion internally, core of it, and then from external. Perhaps we can refer the matter to the source of Islam, at that time when Mohammed the Prophet, which he mentioned a verse on that one, referred to it and said that the morality, and morality is something which is, in fact, relevant to religion.

If morality is observed, that will strengthen the religion on the other side. The person who was, in fact, a leading force on that one, which, in fact, we call Imam [?] Soli[?], who was in the Eastern society a noble person which adhered to that approach. He was a philosopher, and he knew, and then from that he used, and he understood, the modern science and for the understanding of religion, he used the modern science.

It's very difficult to say now in our society that we are not going to reflect and the Constitution. The time is short. I would like to make it brief. There are two aspects of the religion. One is the rules, which cannot be changed, but there are the rules also in our religion, they are flexible, and they are changeable.

Also, there's some principles which are, of course, rigid, perhaps solid, but on the other side there are matters or ways or approaches that religion on subsidiary matters or maybe perhaps some principles can be changed. The religion which was introduced by the Taliban, that was a religion anti-human, anti-freedom, and very rigid, but the true religion is not like that.

If we lose science or knowledge from our hand, wherever he finds it, a Muslim can get it and make use of it. The Koran inside divides the society or human society in two sections; one of society where there's peace, where there's knowledge, science, and the other side of it--a society which lives in peace, the other society where there's always crisis, disturbance and ways and techniques of annoying human beings.

One of the dictums of Islam or the principles are dual societies which lives in peace and dictates to Muslims to go and cooperate with them, and make an assistance with them and be partners with them.

At this time, in this period, when we are working towards internationalism, and obviously there are societies, countries who helped us in beating the terrorism and helped us to stabilize our country, and at that time we do need to seek assistance from them and seek help from them, you know, for the furtherance of the ideals, and goals, and obviously to promote our ambitions.

As the Minister of Justice, as the representative of the Cabinet of Afghanistan, I would like to say that the time of Taliban is gone. After this, there will be a democratic society, and that society will have laws which, in fact, consider all the values of the international societies; in other words, all of the standards and norms of the international society, and meanwhile it will consider the main principle of the Islamic religion as well.

God willing, Afghanistan will soon find its way for a society where law applies, where legality applies, and the freedom of expression prevails, and the human rights are preserved, and the rights of women are guaranteed. We'll go ahead in that way, and in that approach we'll gain that.

In fact, if one thinks within one day we can transform the traditional society to a civil society, that may be too much, but time will show us that we are going, we are applying ourselves, we are, in fact, directing ourselves to approach that fast.

In Europe, of course, the people came, like Descartes, Montesquieu, and those other people, to help the people, help their society to let them pass those traditional societies and go to the civil society, and they are now in that stage and that standard.

I will end my speech by saying that at the beginning, the name of Medina, where Mohammed lived and preached, the name of it was Yathrib, and then it was changed its name to Medina, where law prevailed, where dignity of human beings was observed and kept. So we are going to, with the help of our people, we are going to lead our society to that direction to be like this.

Thank you very much.