



LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER ABDEL-RAHIM ELKEIB

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MARWAN MUASHER: Good morning. Let me just before we start mention that for security reasons, the doors of the room will be closed for the duration of the event. So I hope we can call on your understanding.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Marwan Muasher. I'm vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I would like to thank you for joining us for what promises to be a very fascinating discussion.

By now I think it should be apparent to all that the Arab awakening will not be measured in months or maybe even years but in decades and maybe generations. In the last 14 months, longtime autocrats like Ben Ali, Mubarak, Gadhafi and Saleh have fallen. And in Syria, Bashar al-Assad's days also appear to be numbered.

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These are hugely important developments, brought about by people of tremendous courage, but they are only the beginning of the story. Now begins the painstaking work of governing and rebuilding. And while less dramatic than the fall of a dictator, the decisions made today by leaders in Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli and elsewhere will powerfully shape the future of the Arab world.

In Libya's case, the fall of Gadhafi raises a host of challenging questions: How do you rebuild political institutions hollowed out by 42 years of misrule? What can be done to ensure government is transparent and responsive to the will of the people? And how do you disarm and reintegrate the country's militias?

How do you breathe life into the economy?

Our guest this morning is intimately familiar with all these challenges. As many of you know, His Excellency Abdurrahim Elkeib was a dissident under the Gadhafi regime. Exiled from Libya in the '70s, he was educated in the United States and served as professor of electrical engineering – so a problem solver – at the University of Alabama for several decades. He dropped everything early last year to join the uprising against Gadhafi and played an integral role helping finance and lead the revolution.

Last October, he was elected prime minister of Libya by the National Transitional Council and is today responsible for overseeing the country's rebuilding efforts and shepherding Libya to elections this summer. It is our great pleasure to have him here at Carnegie today.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming His Excellency Prime Minister Abdurrahim. (Applause.)

[00:03:16]

PRIME MINISTER ELKEIB: Thank you. (Clears his throat.) Excuse me. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I'm honored and very pleased to be here with you today, and I want to thank the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for their kind invitation and for their

outstanding program which supports and promotes the rights of people, the freedom and dignity worldwide. Very pleased to be here.

For many Libyans, myself included, freedom and dignity in our country were distant dreams only eight months ago.

To retain his grip on power in Libya, Gadhafi used the most repugnant tools in his arsenal – Gadhafi used the most repugnant tools in his arsenal: pervasive fear, systematic repression and brutal violence – brutal violence. His regime's priority was the dehumanization of our people. His personal political theory was self-serving to his ego and his interest, and his alone.

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After over 40 years of silence, Libyans could be silent no more. Driven by a desperate desire for dignity and an iron resolve for freedom, they erupted. On the 17th of February, a little over a year – a little over a year ago today, our young Libyan women and men took to the streets of Benghazi, protesting peacefully the unjust imprisonment of Libyan activists.

A few days later – just a few days later, this was echoed in Tripoli, when the Tripolitarians took to the streets, chanting: Benghazi, we sacrifice our lives and blood for you!

Eventually other cities followed. They followed suit, and the first popular revolution in the history of Libya broke out.

However, the road to dignity, equality and freedom was very costly. The brutal regime could not adhere to the will of the Libyan people without a vicious fight. It promised, and I quote, "rivers of blood," close quote. And I quote, "hundreds of thousands of deaths," close quote. And it was determined to deliver on that unwavering promise the most violent attacks were launched against our people, supposedly his people. Fire was open on unarmed protesters, and heavy weapons were used to crush them and crush them forever.

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But they were not to be crushed. That was the moment and the tenacity in which the tide of history was turned. Our brave men and women, armed with nothing but courage and resolve, faced a – the well-prepared and well-equipped Gadhafi army. Untrained but determined men, thirsty for freedom, picked up weapons to fight, picked up weapons for the first time to fight. Women pushed their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers to join the quest for dignity and freedom.

Others – and some of them are here – worked the phones and the Internet to plead for help from the international community.

It was a difficult battle, to say the least. The Gadhafi killing machine would not slow down. Libyan lives were harvested, and harvested in thousands. Body parts of thousands of our young men were lost – literally thousands of them.

And I am not sure if I should say this, but you need to know that many of our young men and women were raped, and other – and for others, reproductive organs were literally cut off.

As the revolution was entering its second month, things were looking painfully grim, and we all held our breath. But courage, resolve and the decisive point of no return was reached, and this turned events around. You, the international community, chose not to sit quiet and watch as we were being massacred.

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To our gratitude, the international community decided to implement the U.N. resolution to protect civilians, and rallied to our support. The international community was united under the U.N. resolution, the cornerstone of which was to protect innocent civilians, and it acted accordingly. These enormous efforts were initiated by our Arab brothers and sisters in the Arab League, and later with our friends and partners around the world. And I take the opportunity to tell them all thank you.

Such efforts gave us the motivation we needed to continue our fight and push forward unyieldingly. Our citizen army of teachers, mechanics, lawyers, students, engineers, doctors, professors and businessmen suffered great losses, along with the rest of the civilian population, but stood strong, stood strong in their pursuit of democracy, shared governance and rule of law.

With great courage and sadly, sadly, also with great loss, we managed to push back Gadhafi forces from the east of Libya. We endured and broke the inhumane siege of Misurata and Zintan, maintaining the unity of our country. We then freed Zlitan. We took all – we took control of the western mountains, and then we liberated Tripoli, Sabha and Sirte.

After a few months and thousands of dead – thousands of dead and wounded young men and women, we freed our holy country from the grip of the tyranny and declared the liberation of Libya on October 23rd, 2011. It was latent energy, latent energy, and the thirst and hunger for equality and democracy within the Libyan people which has brought to life freedom and gave us back our dignity.

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The Libyan revolution is a proof of the incredible resilience and tenacity of the Libyan people. Whereas Gadhafi may have believed that he had contained, even extinguished Libyans' dreams of freedom and dignity over four decades, he was proven strong (sic), comprehensively and graciously wrong. When he uttered his now infamous question, who are you, the cry went up all Libya: We are Libyans, and we will be free. Yes, now we are all free.

Today, a year after the outbreak of our great revolution, its electrifying spirit is still alive on the streets of our country. It is exciting, it is liberating and it is truly humbling, humbling specifically to those of us who are entrusted with political responsibility during this period.

It is perhaps tempting to speak of a role of guardianship, but that would be too presumptuous. All Libyans are guardians of this revolution, all of them. I see our role as interim government as being primarily to facilitate and to focus the tremendous energy of the Libyan people to help try to ensure that it is used in such a way as to realize the aims of the revolution and keep it alive.

We acknowledge that the times ahead will be challenging. Forty- two years of dictatorial rule have taken their toll on our country and people – 42 years.

We cannot build our new country overnight. We cannot build new institutions overnight. We cannot build awareness, understanding and acceptance of a new order overnight. All this will take some time. And mistakes will be made. However, Libyans will prove their perseverance and resolve yet again and rise up to the challenge.

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There may be times when things in Libya may appear to the outside world to be deviating from their track, but we, the Libyan people, will bring them back on course. Libyans are learning, for the first time in four decades, to have trust in their government. Most Libyans have never known a government – and never cared to know that government – which served them or which deserved their respect. Quite the opposite. It is for the members of my government to prove that we are different, that we understand and respect the principles and the spirit of the revolution, that we are acting in the interest of all Libyans and that we are building the future with them and for them.

The principles of the revolution need to be nurtured and promoted if they are to be upheld. Libyans fought for democracy, and it is our job as interim government to pave the way for democracy to take root in Libya. We are working hard to build it. We realize that democracy is not just a concept, but a system which has to be built up piece by piece. Therefore, the National Transitional Council, our presiding body, recently passed the election law and appointed the election commission that would carry on the job for the election.

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Soon we will be electing the National Assembly, the first democratically elected body in over 40 years. My government will do its part to ensure that these elections are a success, because we understand that these elections are the first stage of Libya's accelerated path to genuine democracy.

There is surprising parallelism between the Libyan and American experience in fighting for democracy. Take, for example, the formation of the Continental Congress as a transitional government body of the United States during and after the American Revolution. It led the states both along the path towards an elected government and to a convention which drafted the American Constitution. In much the same way, the National Transitional Government has represented the Libyan movement during and after the uprising and will also guide the upcoming election of the National Assembly in June.

The National Assembly will oversee the drafting of a constitution which will serve as a bedrock, as a bedrock for our democracy and ensure peaceful transitions between elected

governments. It will define the rights and responsibilities of all Libyans. George Washington once said, and I quote, the constitution is a guide that I will never abandon. And Libyans, too, embrace this idea as we move forward with our democratic transition.

Libyans also fought for human rights, and as interim government, we must pave the way so that human rights are respected and guaranteed in the new Libya. As I explained in the 19th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva less than a week ago, several concrete steps towards ensuring that – the human rights of all Libyans have already been taken.

Violations of these rights have been and will be investigated.

In this regard, we have formed an interministerial committee chaired by the minister of justice and with membership of the Ministry of Interior, Defense and Culture and Civil Society.

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Libyans fought for – fought for justice and the rule of law, and it is this government's mission to lay their foundation. We have a diversity of people in Libya, but our differences are rooted in the past, not in the future. We believe in equality and equal opportunities for all. We all believe in a Libya in which second- class citizens of region – or regions have no place; a Libya in which all Libyans, regardless of background, gender, affiliation, ethnicity, have freedom, equal rights, access to opportunities and a voice in civic affairs.

We all believe in a country in which women and youth have a strong presence and play an active role, their rightful role, in shaping society and building the future – future Libya.

We are also committed to national reconciliation, because we are well aware that without social peace, no country can move forward. We believe – we have been actively involved in this and are seriously exploring the possibility of forming an association for national reconciliation, streamlining the process of reconciliation and related issues.

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Since I am in Carnegie, I also should add that we are working to build a strong civil society which will serve to address social problems, promote transparency, transparency and accountability.

Over four decades, the Gadhafi regime misappropriated resources which should have been used to the benefit of the Libyan people. This cannot and will not happen again. Libyans finally deserve to live up to their great potential, enjoy a better quality of life, first-class education and excellent health care.

On the international scale, we are laying the foundation for the emergence of Libya as a Mediterranean financial center which links Europe and the West to Africa and the Middle East, a country engaged in the international community as a responsible and

dependable force for good in the world, a country which will engage the international community as an effective collaborative partner to address key issues such as human rights.

There are some who chose to dwell today on our challenges, on our differences and on our mistakes. I have no problem with that. But I believe that in so doing, they lack both perspective – perspective and an understanding of history and of the human spirit in Libya. As Libyans, we have much to discuss and to learn as citizens of our newly free country – to learn about rights but also about responsibilities, to learn about the role of civil society and a free media. And we have – and I make no apology for repeating this again – all the institutions of the state to rebuild from scratch, a huge challenge but a truly exciting one.

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Like all countries, we have challenges. Like all countries, we have differences. And like all countries, we make mistakes. But the real question for me is whether we have a plan to meet those challenges, whether we have a common vision much greater than our differences and whether we can learn from our mistakes.

I would like to offer a resounding yes to each of those questions.

There are far too many examples in recent history of countries which have failed in their bid to accelerate the transition from dictatorship to democracy. This has given plenty of encouragement to those who insist that freedom and democracy take decades, if not centuries, to establish. Libya will prove – will prove these wrong.

We are blessed with many factors in our favor, including our oft-cited natural resources. But, above all, we have pride – we have pride and confidence in the knowledge that we overcame one of the most brutal and dangerous dictatorships of the modern age.

Over the past year, we did whatever – what everyone thought was impossible. I know, over this coming year, we will again do what everyone might think impossible. Again, we are determined to turn the tide of history.

[00:26:53]

We have freed ourselves of our recent past, excited for our future and grateful to our friends and partners who helped us come this far. We are now proud to call ourselves your partners, two nations which believe in the same fundamental values of freedom, equality, opportunity and success.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. MUASHER: Thank you very much, Prime Minister, for these very encouraging words. We're going to open up the floor for about 30 minutes of questioning.

Before we do that, if I can take the opportunity myself to ask the first one, I think we heard some very encouraging words about Libya's commitment to democracy and to a pluralistic society moving forward. And indeed this has been a concern, I think of many both in the region and here, of the cause of pluralism in the Arab world. Will the Arab world finally be able to put in place a system that would ensure a pluralistic society or will it simply replace one set of autocrat regimes by another? And I think your words have assured many

of your commitment to do this, but of course, the road is not easy in a region and a country that has not known democracy for a long time.

And I hope you can maybe shed more light about reasons for your confidence that indeed the emerging system will be resilient to any efforts to impose once again – one set of rules and one set of thought as opposed to political diversity and cultural diversity at all times.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: A question coming out of an electrical engineer. (Laughter.)

MR. MUASHER: We're both electrical engineers by the way. (Laughter.)

[00:29:07]

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Well, you know, when I first got to be directly exposed to the process of our young men and women revolting against Gadhafi's regime, it was something that gave me a feeling I've never had before. We – many of us here in fact, in this room were in the opposition against Gadhafi, and we went through different experiences, fantastic experiences in fact.

We tried different ways and means. But this was different. It's not a group – it started with a small group, but it ended up bringing everybody together – started with young men and women, and it brought everybody together.

And it was amazing, you know. I mean, when I first was in the western mountains looking at who those young men and women – they were really young, young and determined. And it's amazing; they just felt it – deep inside, they felt that, yeah, they could do it. First time I see a large group of young men and women in Libya – in fact, even in the Arab world – it's very unfortunate, and I hate to say this, but this can-do attitude – that was not there. This – in this case, I could see it and I could feel it.

And I asked them, look, I mean, what do you need? I mean, what's missing here? They were, you know – still Tripoli was not – even the mountains and the hills were not liberated yet; of course, the east part was. And they said, look, we just need to get going. They simply could not wait.

[00:31:43]

So with that spirit, I tell you, I guarantee you, they will not let go with what they have earned. It was not given to them. It was not simply a group of us – you know– older men and women telling them what to do. It was them. And this is the resource that will build Libya and guarantees that it is – it has to be a democracy. It can't be anything else.

And you know, one of the reasons why we've been having a little bit of difficulty in trying to reintegrate these young men and women into the Defense Ministry and Interior Ministry – and I mean the real ones – is the fact that they want to make sure that democracy prevails. They tell you, look, we are not interested in anything. We don't need money. We don't need nothing but to make sure that we do have real democracy.

So I don't know if this is the answer you were looking for, but I guarantee you, this is different. I have never seen anything like it in my life. And I didn't – I don't know everything, but I think I do a little bit. So – I know a little bit about a few things. Sorry.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you, sir.

Let's open it up, please. Please keep it a short question. We have a lot of interest and a lot of questions, I'm sure, and not so much time.

Q: My name's Peter Samona (ph). I'm with Capital Intel Group (ph). From somebody's that looked at Libya from the outside – and I've just been recently traveling quite often to Tripoli and Libya, and one of the things that strikes someone when you go to Tripoli is there's amazing intellectual capital. You have budding entrepreneurs. This country is going to do miracles. We're going to go 5G in, you know, a year, while, you know – and there's credible (ph) brains, there's – people want to do things. They want to create jobs.

[00:33:56]

And I think some of the things that maybe we should be talking about is, let's go business to business, you know. What we can do today, you know, can be done today on the private sector. Everything else will take time. Tunisia has a billion dollars in infrastructure finance from the African Development Bank. They're moving forward. And Libya is really the new market. And I'd say in nine months to a year, this is really going to be the game changer, not only for the region but for the West also. Thank you, sir.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: OK. Please.

Q: Ned Enwar (ph) with Johns Hopkins Center, Transatlantic Relations. My question is, do you believe that equality between men and women in Libya is the right answer when the transitional government has announced as a first new law the reintroduction – sorry – of polygamy in Libya?

MR. MUASHER: All right. Let's take one more and then allow the prime minister to answer.

[00:35:07]

Please.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: (Inaudible.)

Q: My name is Aysha Mahmoud (sp), I'm with the American Turkish Council. Just briefly, sir, I was one of the victims of Gadhafi regime. When it first happened, 42 years ago, I was a mere child. So I've lived in Libya pre-, post- and during Gadhafi, and I know exactly what happened.

My question is regarding the infrastructure and construction and rebuilding you're going to have in Libya. You have asked Prime Minister Erdogan recently that you wanted the Turkish construction companies to go back. And maybe to this gentleman's question it's

an addition. Are you ready for this – projects to start, for the business? And is the security something that they can trust, I mean, because that's probably the biggest question in the minds of everyone, including the American businesses. Thank you.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Please.

Concerning in the role of women, I strongly believe in that, you know. I mean, I have no – nothing else to add but tell you that my – maybe give you an example. My wife has more degrees than I do. So I strongly believe that women must play a role – it's not an option – and their right role.

And we can see here some very smart Libyan ladies. You know, one of them is our minister of social affairs. That lady worked on her Ph.D. – fantastic lady. There are some more here. They're all Libyan ladies, and they will have a place and presence, and we love to see them do miracles, and I'm sure they will.

[00:37:03]

Now, polygamy, I don't know if this is the proper place to discuss this, but I'm fine with one, you know, so – (laughter) – and I'm not going to add another one. But I tell you, I mean, you know, if I forget my title as prime minister and I talk to you as a friend, you know, directly, how many of us have a wife and more than one without being wife? You know, many of us, unfortunately, do that.

But in Libya, I guarantee you, this is not going to be something of a problem, and I don't think this is something that people want to do. I don't know how it came out, but I don't – I – don't worry about it, OK? It's not going to be a problem. I guarantee you this.

Now, projects to – starting soon, yes, we want them to come back as soon as possible. Security – is it 100 percent proof? No. Close to 100 percent? Yes. Can it be improved? Can it better? I'd say yes.

But anywhere you go, security's not 100 percent proof. This is the time to be in Libya. I guarantee you this. And we're looking for long-term relationships, partnerships, I should say, rather than just somebody who is coming there for a hit-and-run type situation.

Q: (Off mic.)

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Yeah. So please do. And if we can help you in any way to come back, by all means.

[00:39:02]

MR. MUASHER: Let me read some questions from the other room. We have an overflow today, so we have people sitting in the other room, and they have to send their questions in writing. I'll read three questions, if I may.

One has to do with militia groups in Libya, who, according to the question, are resisting demobilization and appear to be preparing to influence the coming elections. What will the government do to prevent armed groups to play an intimidating role – role on election day?

The second question has to do with the new constitution and whether it will take into account the desire of many Libyans in the east for decentralization.

And the third asked about – if you can describe the transitional government's engagement with Libyan civil society and the private sector to date, what can each sector do to support the transition and the new government?

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Thank you very much.

Concerning the – I respectfully do not disagree – do not agree with the word "militia" because we don't have "militias." We have young men who fought hard, and they had to form groups, and they call themselves brigades. I feel uncomfortable calling them "militias" because different concept, I guess.

[00:40:40]

What is happening is that these young men are our brothers, our sons, and we want to take care of them. They did this for us. It's not like, you know, people forming militias because they belong to a certain sector, because they belong to a certain group somewhere. You know, in the – in the – in Misurata, for example, you see people from everywhere in Libya, and it is literally like that. People came from the eastern part, the south, the west, everywhere and they came to Misurata and fought together. Everybody thought it's only people from Misurata. No, it was from everywhere. In Tripoli, the same thing happened. In the mountains, the same thing happened. So this is not militias as we understand militias.

So what we did was we said, look, I mean, we can't just tell them, now, you did your job; give us back your arms; and just get going, you know, with your life. That's not the way we want to do it. We need them to understand and try to explain and then work with them.

[00:42:13]

So what we did is we said, let's have a project, a big project that would try to integrate them or reintegrate them, and this project is now in place. It has three dimensions. You know, one is the Interior Ministry; those who are interested in security-type work and police work and all that, they can go there. Then we give them training, we give them decent salaries, and we give them hope that they can actually progress and develop.

And another one is the defense ministry, and they can be part of the armed forces. That is the same thing. You know, we treat them with respect; we give them decent salary, training, et cetera.

And then those who – and right now, we have 20,000 of them, and this is going to grow into probably three – 30,000, maybe even more – we have budgeted for 50 of them, 25 in each group. And then we have formed an association, we call it, that that would take those who are not interested neither in the police force nor in the armed forces and give them opportunities to – for training: fellowships to go to universities outside the country, maybe inside, and/or do post-graduate studies; can go get their bachelor's and Ph.D. and what have you; and there are many of them like that. Or maybe if they are interested in starting a small company, we give them small- and medium-sized loans so they can do that.

[00:44:16]

And I think we're being successful. We have 130,000 of them who registered in this association, and we are going to do whatever it takes to give them the best we can in terms of offering them a better life. I think this will be – we will – we are succeeding in this. We actually have sent thousands of them outside the country, in fact, to Jordan. Some would go to Turkey, some may come here, some to Europe, the U.K., maybe France, and other places. And I think this will automatically – maybe this is still – it's not a hypothetical; it is happening. They would give back their arms and get on with their life.

So one good sign about how peaceful and how successful elections can be in Libya is the recent elections that took place in Misurata, for example, went very peacefully. It was very successful. And another sign of how peaceful the country is are the celebrations, the spontaneous coming together of the people in celebrating the first anniversary of the revolution. You can see it in Benghazi and Tripoli, in the big cities, with no problems whatsoever. And no penny was paid by the government. It was just spontaneous. I mean, people just simply came out and celebrated.

[00:44:50]

Before I came here, I prepared a video clip, but I thought – it was very unfortunate that it was not perfect, so I didn't bring it with me to share with you. But I'll send it to you after we refine it, because we do things in a crude way still, you know, but we'll get there. That's the militia groups.

In terms of decentralizing the government operations, we're all for it. We strongly believe that the past regime meant to centralize operations for the wrong reasons, and maybe – and he knew that it is going to cause problems. I mean, it's totally unfair for someone to travel from one city a thousand kilometers or even 300 kilometers or even 200 kilometers to just apply for a visa or maybe try to get just an official document signed. It's ridiculous, you know. This reminds you of the 18th and 19th century. It can't work anymore.

So we are doing a number of things. One thing is that we are – we have already prepared, and we just simply are filing it, the law that divides Libya into districts... (Speaks aside.)

MR.: Governorates?

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Governorates, yes. So that will totally decentralize the operation.

The other thing, for now, we will have representation of the government in Benghazi and in Sirte, you know, where people can actually communicate with the government through those offices directly and get quick responses. We're also asking governments to have consulates in those two cities, and we're getting positive response. We have Turkey, for example, Italy, I think a few others. The British, I think, we also do the same, and many of them will do that. I hope the U.S. will also do that.

We are also planning, and we have started having some of the major operations being in – for example, we have a water resource department. It's a huge department and it does take – it is in charge of this river – (off-side conversation).

MR. : The man-made.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: The man-made river, which is a huge project. I mean, it's a big one, desalinization plant, and also other water resources, and this will be located in Benghazi. This is a big operation. And we'll do more for Sebha and for Benghazi. We are also working on this electronic government project, and this will definitely be quite helpful in decentralizing the operation.

[00:49:14]

So we're going to do things in a way that would comfort the Libyan individual, and hopefully, we'll take care of this, but it will take a little bit of time.

The private sector. Just before coming here, I had a meeting with what may be 30 to 40 Libyans who are in the private sector, and we – this is not the first time. I have a couple of my colleagues on the Cabinet who met with them in Benghazi and in other places. And we communicate. We feel strongly that in Libya, you have three pillars that should work together in supporting and creating the new Libya, and that is the government, the private sector and the civil society.

Civil society is really flourishing. It is doing a great job there. And we meet with them and things are going very well.

MR. MUASHER: Let's take – please, sir. I think we have room for maybe one last round of questions, so let's take three or four.

Q: Thank you. My name is Andrew Sorjanski (ph). I'm with ITAR- TASS news agency of Russia.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your remarks. My question for you is this. Would you – would you welcome the Russian companies back to Libya? And will you – will your government honor the contracts and deals struck under the Gadhafi regime? And what will be with their projects, including those with a Russian participation, which have been suspended? Are you – do you discuss – do you discuss these things with the Russian government? Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: Yes, sir. Please.

[00:51:08]

Q: Jacques Roumani (ph), University of Maryland and Libya scholar. Mr. Prime Minister, Your Excellency, I have a – two-part questions focused on minorities of Libya, if I may.

Secretary Clinton yesterday praised the building of inclusive democracy in Libya under your leadership, which you have – you have eloquently emphasized this morning. I know Libya faces multiple challenges ahead, but could you kindly tell us your government's

thinking about including the Berber and the Zaikhs (ph) and the Jewish community that once lived in Libya for over 2,000 years and then forced to leave.

In this regard – and this is the second part of the question – can the Jewish community of Libya hope for a symbolic recognition and restoration of its important religious and cultural heritage as Libyans, such as synagogues, cemeteries and houses of learning that were destroyed by the Gadhafi regime? I know that many young Libyans today are not even aware of the existence of this millenary community on Libyan soil, but they're curious to find out, and especially from their – find out from their parents and grandparents, who tell them about their good relations with their Jewish neighbors for many, many centuries, and hopefully in the future.

[00:52:35]

MR. MUASHER: Please, one last question. Lady over here.

Q: Hi. Ana Abu Zakuk (ph). I'm with Freedom House and Libya Outreach Group. But more importantly, I'm a Libyan-American. First of all, let me commend you and thank you and your team. We support you, and in fact we would like to see more of you.

So the first question is in regards to transparency. If – you know, what efforts are you guys taking – or not even what efforts; is it possible for you to just convey on a more weekly or daily basis what it is you're doing? Because at least for those of us here – I'm based in D.C. – it seems as though we're getting more of the – indications from the National Transitional Council versus the government. And then with that regard, can you explain what are the different responsibilities between the interim government and that of the National Transitional Council?

I work with Freedom House. We're a watchdog human rights organization, but we also do civil society programming. So I'd also like to hear from you what kind of training do you see as needed for organizations that are planning to come to Libya so we can help out in the development of civil society. Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: Please, sir.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Concerning Russia, we wished that Russia would have felt what was going on in Libya during the first – or during the eight months of the revolution, you know. Did they see what was happening? I don't know. I hope they didn't. Was it OK if they saw what was happening but never cared? I would say maybe "never cared" is not necessarily the proper word. But whether they had a political agenda that served their own objectives in this world, I can say they have the right to.

[00:54:58]

Are we happy with how Russia handled the situation? Respectfully, no. Do we welcome Russia to come back and work on projects? Yes, as long as they don't serve the past regime and have no connections with it. Do we honor contracts? I tell you yes, but after reviewing them. They have to be legal and we have to make sure that corruption was not a major part of it.

Hope I answered your questions. So yeah, by all means. We want to be a positive force in this world in a small way, based on our size. But I tell, you know, I mean, this was a costly revolution. It was not easy, and I hope our Russian friends realize that.

So yeah, you're welcome to come back. Keep in mind that we don't want the past regime anymore, and we're not going to take it anymore. And we don't want to even smell it anymore, so – but yeah, you're welcome. And I guarantee, we'll honor our contracts.

The minorities? You know, I lived in – half of my life in Tripoli. And Tripoli – and I was in the center of town. In fact, that's where I was born. And next door, we had – maybe one block from where I was born and raised was a Catholic church, a big one. And we had an Italian community around us. But I never felt that there was a problem, you know. I mean, we communicated. We – by the way, I spoke a little bit of Italian, you know – you know.

[00:57:22]

And two blocks – and I remember exactly where – diagonally from where I lived – don't know if that's two blocks diagonally – two blocks this way, two blocks that way – you – we had a synagogue, you know. Just across from my house, we had a Jewish family living there, yeah. I remember the name of the son who was my age – Glimo (ph). His name was Glimo (ph). So there was no problem.

You know, what causes problems is when you have a hidden agenda. If I have a hidden agenda, you wouldn't want to work with me. We want to be transparent, clear, and we want to work together. And if that's the case and that's difficult; that's really difficult, you know – if we get to that point, I think the world will be a fantastic world to live in.

But in our government, first of all, I tell you, I am a firm believer that I don't – and maybe this is wrong; I don't know. I do not ask somebody to serve on my government just because he is from this sector, this group or that group. That's not my criteria.

If it so happened – I know – I'm a firm believer that talent is all over Libya, be it Berber, be it Tabou (ph), be it Tuareg, be it whatever you want to call it, you know – and Arab this or that. But it so happened that we now have – and I tell you this sincerely – we have two ladies on our Cabinet – strong, capable – and they're doing a good job.

[00:59:35]

One of them is here, and I'm pleased and honored to be on the same team, to work together. Another one is – she is the health minister – one of the toughest jobs in Libya, you know. Health care is crazy, you know. So that's two.

And then we have a Berber. I did not select – I didn't know that he was a Berber, by the way, but it just – seriously.

He served as the undersecretary, and then the secretary resigned. So he became – but without me knowing that he was a Berber. And then, finally, I was just talking to him, and I found out that he is.

I lived in a place where people from different origins and backgrounds were there, but we never asked each other, where are you from, OK? And when I came here to the States, I felt the same way. I served on – with – you know, with another group on minority activities and things like that.

But in Libya, it's not – like, you know, the Gadhafi regime created this feeling, OK? It never existed, at least as far as I'm concerned. So I guarantee you it is going to be a different Libya *insbaallah* – transfer – I mean – you see, I told you. We have women, young ladies here in Libya that we are so proud of.

[01:01:07]

This is a difficult question; I can't answer all of it. But I've touched parts of it. (Chuckles.)

You know, in terms of transparency, if nothing else, you know, fighting corruption and transparency are two things we want to make sure – that we – that they exist, strongly. So we have been doing whatever we can. Our books are opened; anybody can look into them. I mean, legitimate groups can look into them. We are – we – I'll be talking today to the World Bank. We want to see how we can create even more transparency into the system. We will be also looking into the open government concept, be sending someone high-level to attend this coming – the upcoming conference in Brazil. So – but we are very serious about this.

I mean, corruption has been – Libya was up there in the – in that scale, you know? We don't want that to happen anymore. So we're working very hard there.

Now, this is – the – Miss– she raised – Miss Zakuk (ph) mentioned that we are not – we're not in the media telling people what they're doing. And yes, indeed this is a problem, you know? It's a mistake. It's a mistake, but it's just natural.

[01:02:42]

Most of us are just technocrats, you know? We have not done politics before; we never cared to be in the media. I personally feel like if I do that too much, people would probably just say, gosh, he's there all the time, you know? But now we have appointed a gentleman who is well-spoken, articulate, and he will be our spokesman. So, yes, indeed, we – you're right, you know? We haven't done it before. We never cared. We felt it's a short time anyway, so you don't need to do it, but we missed point. So we'll – we – you'll see more and you'll hear more about what we do.

The role of NTC (sic) – it's a – that's the legislative body, and we are the executive one, if you want. There is, of course, because it's something new in our country, so sometimes there are some interactions, and we try to draw the line, and – but it will work though.

[01:03:45]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you very much.

I'm afraid this is all the time we have. Let me please ask you to – (scattered applause) – first remain seated until the prime minister leaves and then joining me – join me in thanking the prime minister for very refreshing remarks and wishing you all the best in rebuilding Libya.

PRIME MIN. ELKEIB: Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)