Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

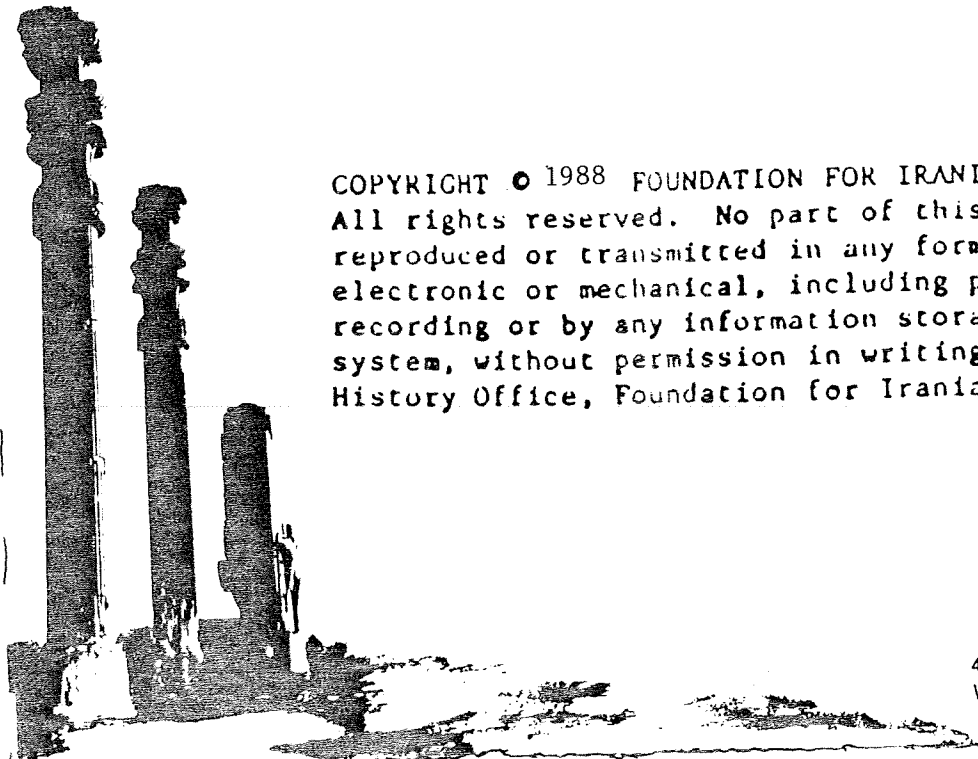
ELIZABETH REID

بنیاد مطالعات ایران
Foundation for Iranian Studies

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH REID

INTERVIEWER: MAHNAZ AFKHAMI

OAKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, APRIL 14, 1988



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PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by Mahnaz Afkhami with Elizabeth Reid in Oakland, New Zealand in April 14, 1988.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

بنیاد مطالعات ایران

FOUNDATION FOR IRANIAN STUDIES

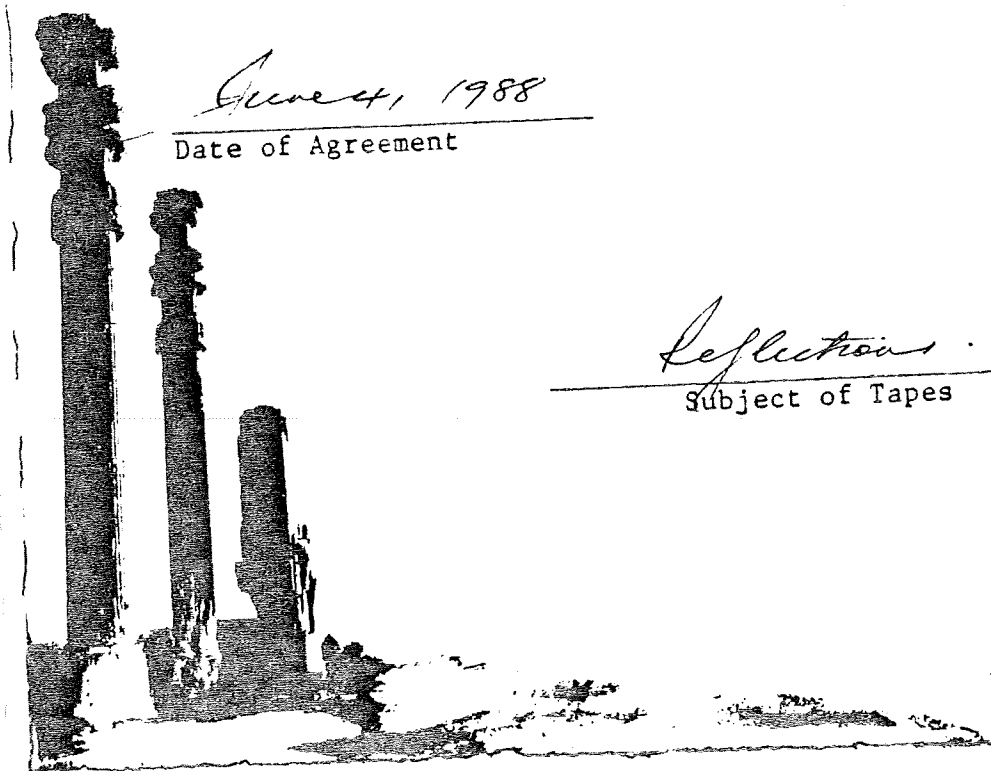
I hereby give and grant to the Foundation for Iranian Studies as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Foundation shall determine, the tape recordings and their contents as listed below.

Elizabeth Reid
Interviewee

M. Ghahreman
Interviewer

June 4, 1988
Date of Agreement

Reflections
Subject of Tapes



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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Elizabeth Reid was born in Australia in 1942. After completing her higher education in England she returned to Australia, where she taught and researched in academia. Following the victory of the Labor Party in the elections of of 1972, Ms. Reid was appointed the Minister for Women's Affairs and Advisor to the Prime Minister. After serving in this post for a number of years, Ms. Reid became special advisor to the Women's Organization of Iran, with which she had cooperated in many U.N. projects concerning women. In Iran, Ms. Reid advised the Women's Organization on matters pertaining to the preparations of the Mid-Decade Conference on Women, and such projects as the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific. Her period of stay in Tehran coincided with the disturbances leading to revolution, and as a result her memoirs shed much light on the interaction between women and the revolutionary forces.

CORRECTION:

Throughout this interview ISCAT should be ESCAP: Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific.

Interviewee: Elizabeth Reid Interview # 1

Interviewer: Mahnaz Afkhami Place: Oakland, New Zealand

Date: April 14, 1988

Q. Elizabeth, thank-you for agreeing to do the interview. Could you start with something about your background and where you were born and your education?

Reid: Right. Okay. Well, I was born in 1942 in Australia in a country town called Towree. Both my parents were teachers and I was the eldest of, as it turned out eventually, six children. One of the important features is that on my father's side we came of Irish stock. His father came over in the gold rush, and the story has it, landed in Oakland; went to the local pub; met the pub owner's daughter; eloped and went to the gold fields. On my mother's side we were of Scottish and German ancestry. In fact, her father's mother came from Scotland. She, and her husband and two children were to immigrate to Australia at the time of sailing ships. There was a six month wait to get a passage on a boat. Her husband died and she decided despite that to continue -- she was an unskilled women; she had no training at all -- to

continue with her children to Australia. She went to the gold fields and she worked as a midwife. So that my mother's father began life as a miner; studied at night and became a teacher. I think on both sides were families of teachers. My father is the only person on either side who has a university degree. So that although all four of the grandparents were teachers of one sort or another -- And I think interestingly enough, despite the fact that I came from this background and that I was the oldest child, as a woman I always assumed that I would go on to university and I did. I went on. I started studying economics and statistics and political science, etcetera. I moved eventually into philosophy and maths and logic and so my first degree, which I got from the Australian National University in Cambera, is an honor's degree; first class honors in philosophy. I went from there on to Oxford where I did a B. Phil. in philosophy. In those days -- life's different now -- in those days a B. Phil. in philosophy was considered to be a more significant degree than a Ph.D. Basically, I'm trained as a philosopher.

Q: And your first job was?

Reid: I returned to Australia after that and, in fact, went into the university. I saw my life stretching out ahead of me as an academic. I went into the Philosophy Department and worked in the Philosophy Department. I finished in Oxford in '70 and I went back to Australia mid year and worked there. At the end of

'72 in Australia we elected a labor government; elected Guth Whitlam as Prime Minister. This was the first time we had a labor government for twenty-three years, so we had a long period of time with the Liberal party, coalition; National party in power. So there was a tremendous ferment. It was a very exciting period in Australian history. There was this feeling that it was time for change. That there was a time for new principles to be manifested in the political arena, particularly principles of equity and fairness and things like this. The redistribution of income, protection for illness or accident; all this range of what was then called the democratic socialist platform. As part of that ferment, the women's movement had come to Australia around 1969, and had become a quite significant social movement in Australia within two or three years. A lot of the women had very good conceptual and analytical skills. They were beginning to analyze the situation of women and to make strong demands for something that would improve these. So that in the early months or, indeed, in the first couple of months of the Whitlam government he decided that he needed on his staff somebody who could advise him -- somebody, indeed, from this background -- who could advise him about the sort of policy issues that needed to be brought into the political arena relating to women. And it was never a tokenism. It was never a question of "Oh, look, we'll bring in the presence of some traditional women's organization." It was very strongly: "We need somebody from this new social movement," which then was the Women's Liberation Movement, "and we need that person in here

advising us what are we do to if we believe in a just and equitable world? What do we need to do to make sure that women are benefiting fully, also, from this change?" So I came in then early in '73. I was appointed as his adviser. Now, this had never happened in the history of Australia and, indeed, in the world at that time. It was virtually unknown. The only possible role model would be the Swedish. The Swedes had had a commission on the equality of women, I think it was called, probably from the late '60s. I forget the exact date. One had heard a bit about that. This was a commission. It wasn't like a minister or an advisor to the Prime Minister, but it was a precedent. Indeed, in India they had also had a commission on women, at least prior to my appointment, going back to the turn into the '70s. But as a minister for women or an advisor to the Prime Minister, there had been certainly no precedent in Australia. It was a move that divided Australia because a) I was taken from the Women's Liberation Movement b) I was a philosopher. I believed in the search for the truth. I thought if people asked questions, even if they were journalists, that you answered truthfully. You thought it through and answered the truth. We were on this long road searching for the truth. The sort of things I believed in, I believed in strongly and they came from that primary concern for women. So the press had a hay day. Here it was, they would come along and ask me what I thought about rape, or adultery, or marijuana, or abortion, all these highly contentious issues, and certainly, at least initially, I answered them. I told them exactly what the arguments for and

against abortion were and where I stood on them or whatever it was I thought about it. So, of course, the headlines came out and distorted, so it wasn't just that that position polarized Australia. Australia had been polarized about the position before anybody was appointed to it, but also my naive belief that the whole world was engaged upon a search for truth also contributed to the polarization because, of course, the views I held were not shared by a lot. They were shared by lots and not shared by lots of others. So it was contentious. It was a highly visible position. I was constantly sought out by all the media. But beyond all that, it was an extraordinarily challenging time because basically, it was a clean slate. I mean the question was "What do we need to do for women?" So you had to begin by working out what governments can and can't do and then amongst what governments can do, what needs to be done first and how you go about getting it. I mean, literally I'd never worked in this arenas before. I was brought up in a sort of closeted and protected universe. But it was very challenging. I think the women's movement in each country changes depending upon those who get in in the start. In the start we brought in particularly a lot of social historians. So women who were used to analyzing the past, but the past from a particular perspective, which was the social history of the past. Therefore, we had a lot of skills that transferred knowledge of the past into assessments of the present or directions for the future. I think that my job was made much easier because the movement itself had done a lot of the analysis. My job really

was to somehow bring together the analysis with the realities of political life and work out how you move.

Q: Did you have a lot of support from the government?

Reid: I had tremendous support from the Prime Minister and that didn't flag until the end, and as soon as it flagged I resigned. It was the support of a principle person. He had never reflected on the role of women, but if you could put something in terms that he understood, I mean in terms of his own values and beliefs, then it was fine. From the Party itself, Labor Party has its origins in the proletariat, I mean, in the people. In Australia it means very much amongst the workers, and lots of the workers are Irish and have traditional views on these things. So that even in terms of the elected members of the Labor Party the support was, to put it very mildly, very varied. Some were as opposed to me as anybody in the community, and some felt these changes need bringing about. So that support was uneven. I mean, many of these people were attacking me as much as anybody else. The women's movement was a bit divided. There were those in the women's movement who believed that one should take the revolutionary stand and stay outside the structures and just keep on reiterating more toward the changes one needed, and others that believed that you had to change the world. I must say, I, to a certain extent, was in that last category. Those who were reluctant to forego anybody from the women's movement to be coopted in this way felt that this process would in itself change

the nature of the women's movement. Now, I think to a certain extent that's true. I mean, whatever would have happened, if there was going to be money available for women's projects, there were going to be policies which would bring about change, but there was a real ambivalence because some of the most significant changes for women didn't actually originate from governmental circles. They originated from the movement itself. So the first Women's Refuge ever in Australia was the direct result of the activities of the women in Sydney Women's Liberation Movement. These are the ones who before, had been talking about reform versus revolution, but suddenly their analysis started seeing not only women were battered and left homeless, etcetera, but one needed direct action. One couldn't just sit there and describe it. One had to do it. One had to do something about changing it. So through their analysis, they themselves moved into action; into, if you like, straight forward reformism. It was later that the government moved in and said, "Yes, of course, we need these and they should be funded," and off we go. Australia now has an amazing network of women's refuges and women's services, right across the face of the country. The subsequent conservative governments have not been able to cut back or stop. But the support was there, and the support to a great extent wasn't. I think probably these jobs -- Look, I mean let's not misunderstand. Sexual harassment and sexism is rampant. It's as rampant in Parliament houses as it is anywhere else in the world, and the inability of men to work with strong, articulate women unless they sexually subjugate them. Even then they normally

can't work with them afterwards. It was not easy. I found it ultimately extremely lonely and difficult. I certainly received support all the way through, but it flickered and faded. What I felt most, I think, was that on the inside I was learning about the realities of bureaucracies and policy formulation and government implementation and these realities do change your demands because you begin to work out what can be implemented and how certain things can and how certain things can't be implemented. What I lacked was any other women in significant positions. I mean, even the bureaucracy that a) could assist in that process of transforming demands into reality, but b) who knew what I was doing. Basically, there were the women who wanted change, but who were totally outside the processes within which I worked; or there was nobody with me, since it was just me on the other side. So it was difficult for that reason. There were plenty of women who would support, but they weren't inside. I mean, now all that's changing. [unclear]

Q: Now, how long all and all were you in this position?

Reid: Well, it was just going on two-and-a-half years; two-and-a-half years I think.

Q: And the International Women's Year came?

Reid: Yes. So I went in early '73. At the end of '73, early '74, I did a trip around the world looking at social policy

development in a number of other countries. As part of that trip I attended a meeting at the UN in New York. 1974 was the International Population Year, and in the very typical fashion, in that very long process that will result in a draft plan of action that will go to an international conference, suddenly a three or four months before the Conference, it was discovered that women had not significantly been consulted in the process of drafting a plan of action. So they called a meeting of -- I don't know -- seventy-eight senior women in public office or governmental office from around the world to come and put some insight into that plan of action. This was the first time I'd ever functioned in a political arena, international political arena. I found it very exhilarating, very fascinating, and very, very sort of depressing. I mean, it really was abysmal. All these men came in and spoke down at us, sort or really treated us like monkeys swinging from trees or something, and we were powerless. I mean, everything was already printed. They didn't tell us this. One-third of the way, two-thirds of the way through the meeting, somebody was going "It doesn't matter what you decide. All their documents are already printed ready to be shipped to Budapest," or wherever the Conference was. So it was very frustrating, but it was wonderful to be working in that international arena learning about other women and their concerns. That was the first time I'd come across West African women. There were West African women there from small countries, whose concern was population. I mean, they wanted to populate their countries, not to cut back. So they were arguing against

all the sort of contraceptive and family planning and spacing strategies. At first you think, "What's going on here? What are these women arguing this way for?", and then you sit down. I went, "Of course." I said, "I don't really understand. Tell me something." It was an extraordinary process. So then in '75 with the International Women's Year, and again, it wasn't properly prepared at all. A consultant committee was called fairly belated in March, as I recall, and Australia was one of the Western European and other group countries that was represented on the consultant group. I led the Australian delegation to that. Iran was, of course, on the group and at the meeting of the consultant committee. Princess Ashraf was chosen president and I was chosen one of the vice presidents. I can't remember who the other one was. It was very interesting because immediately this very easy working relationship sprung up between the two delegations. These were very small delegations. There was just myself and a man and somebody from a mission in New York. But I remember speaking briefly with Princess Ashraf about this and the plan that we worked out was that she would chair the plenary, but then that she would convene one group as a whole. She felt that I would get elected to chair that, and we would just push on doing all the work, and when we got on consensus on everything, come back and plan it. So it was an excellent working relationship. I remember that most vividly from that meeting, half the frustration of content of the documents, you know, that sort of thing. But that's when we met, during that period. Oh, and you might remember. I mean, it was really

dramatic times because it was the height of the NIEO, the interaction of the NEIO, and also particular the Charter of Rights and Duties of States. The NIEO discussion had been introduced a couple of years earlier. In the General Assembly at the end of '74 Mexico had introduced a Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States as part of the NEIO debate and, of course. Mexico was hosting the 1975 conference. And were very concerned to use that forum as yet another international forum to push ahead with their charter. I remember there were some dramatic moments in the working group, or sub groups of it, as we tried to get agreement on the draft because, I mean, our concern was that whatever went into the ticks should reflect something, a concern for, or should point out the rovens to women of this. Of course, the male Mexican delegate, one could actually feel the "guns on his hip" sort of stuff. I mean, you really felt sort of this threat hanging over you. Certainly, I, as chairperson at the meeting, I was absolutely badgered. It was this terrible feeling. So we negotiated our way through that and then we all then met again in Mexico City in June, July, 1975 for the first Conference for International Women's Year. Again, it was interesting. Now, again, in that conference I didn't want to take an office because I felt I wanted to be free to move. Again, I think it can be said that Australia and Iran stood out as the active delegations. Our activity, to a great extent, was making speeches and rousing people to action and things like this. Out of that conference, I think, the initiative came from Iran for the decade, Iran for the International Institute and

Iran for the Regional Institute. Now, I mean, when we look back at the major achievements there were a couple of major achievements to do with ideology. Perhaps the major achievement to do with initiatives were those three: that move for a decade, the setting up this international network. The UN system was starting to focus on women and their needs. That was, I think, a very valuable conference. By the time I got back to Australia, politics in Australia were beginning to change. The labor government was very much on the defensive. As part of our celebration for International Women's Year we had in August organized a nationwide conference on women and health and in September a nationwide conference on women in politics. Again, this conference was meant to draw together women who were or wanted to be politically active in whatever sphere; local government, trade unions, political parties of any sort. To give them the skills necessary to be able to be effective. Of course, you started with total divisiveness. The Aborigine States were under represented. The country women's status was under represented. It was one of the extraordinary things. So what happened? By now the government felt its position was very delicate. Its supply bills, the budget bills were being stopped in the Upper House. It was running out of money to govern the country. The political scene was getting more and more ugly in many ways. The opening of the Women in Politics Conference, because everybody came with all these expectations and penchants, was quite dramatic. The Prime Minister opened the conference. The labor women, the women from his own party demonstrated behind

him as he was speaking with the television cameras focused on him, against the decision he'd made about East Timal. Aboriginal women gathered outside and marched into the whole scene in the middle of speech, and the radical lesbian feminists desighted because the invitations, all the women had gone out with evening suits. The Protocol Department of the Prime Minister's Department spent twenty-three years under a Liberal government. So the radical lesbian feminists decided they'd come in their evening suits. So they came in their evening suits and then they decided it was time to shake up Parliament House so they raced around all the men's toilets and wrote "lesbian's are lovely" in lipstick and all those sorts of things. The press had a field day. Monday morning within the conferences the tensions were still there all day. It was a long, slow process of working through this conflict or these demands or changing to accommodate them, showing that they weren't based on reality or whatever it was. That process went on very slowly all that day and night. But, of course, the papers were bearing all these great captions showing all this disruption of the Prime Minister's speech and the defacement of Parliament House and all this sort of thing. So at this stage the political advisers around the Prime Minister just moved in him and said, "You are losing votes by supporting women and losing votes by supporting her. You should kick her off your staff and you should draw back totally from any policies for women." Kicking me off his staff, that was one thing. Tuesday the conference was going beautifully. They're still talking about it in Australia. It really was a very significant

event for a whole lot of women. But by the end of the week I had seen the Prime Minister. It became very clear to me that he had withdrawn his commitment. Not just to me, you can deal with that by resigning and kicking some other woman into the position. That's the way you can deal with that. But to any policies, to pushing ahead with any of the policies that we instigated with respect to women. It was the wrong electoral decision. It's one that male political advisers often make, and it's wrong. It was the same as Bella Abzug in the States. They lose a lot of votes when they do, renege publicly on these sorts of policies. I mean, by the end it was just a matter of time. I just had to work out whether it was really an unrescueable position, which it was, and then how do I handle that. I don't want to deny them the extraordinary changes that they had introduced for the women, but I wanted to make it clear to the women of Australia that the time is now passed. So I issued a press release. I went to a journalist on hand and just told him what I had to say; and from then I eventually went from the hub of the political arena in Australia to a log cabin in the wilds of Canada with the grizzly bears and my great self alone. So I sort of took a bit of break up there and wondered what on earth I was going to do in life. I mean, these dramatic changes that you don't expect and you certainly haven't planned for, and when you move out of a seven-day a week eighteen-hour a day job, always under pressure and always working, it is difficult to try and bring your life back together again. I then went on to New York where I had some commitments anyway. I had some speeches to give in the States

around about this time in New York. It was while I was in New York, in December then. I got there the end of October. November, December, and the story as I heard it goes that Princess Ashraf, who was in New York for the General Assembly heard that I had resigned. We got through that General Assembly. All those initiatives, all the significant resolutions, especially the ones Iran had proposed in Mexico City went through the General Assembly. So the question by then was: How do we make sure that the this impetus of International Women's Year doesn't get lost? Surprisingly, a lot of the women who had been very active in Mexico City in '75 were no longer in the positions they held then. I think what Ashraf wanted, I mean, she herself was prepared -- as she explained it to me -- to remain a key front person, a spokesperson and initiator, but she wanted to make sure that she was being fed the right things from the International Center to keep the international arena, to keep that pressure on the UN, on its forum, its bureaucracy, all that, to keep it going so that all these initiatives would turn into realities. So at one stage she sent somebody from the mission, Mehdi Ehsari, and said, "Wherever she is in the world, find her. Bring her here." It was dryly said, "I think she's in the Upper West Side." So I came in. So that was a start of a whole new life, indeed, dramatically so.

Q: So tell us what happened when you went to Iran.

Reid: Right. Well, I went to Iran to work on these

international issues there. I think when I got there, of course, we met up because you were the Head of the Women's Organization, but also because we had this, by now, fairly lengthy contact in the international arena. I think I got there right at the very end of 1975. I think within a week the announcement was made that you were appointed Minister of State for Women's Affairs. That was the timing of that period. So my work, my focus of interest then was to get the International Institute off the ground, the ISCAT, Regional Research and Training Center off the ground, and to continue on with ongoing bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women. To make sure they didn't lose the vision and the commitment and everything that they had generated in 1975. I think we started with the ISCAT Center. As I recall -- I'm not sure now of the ordering -- but I either went straight back to -- I'd only been a week or two in Iran when I went back to Bangkok. Did I go to Adis first or second?

Q: I don't remember, but I remember you were doing --

Reid: I think what happened was there was an Iranian delegation that was going to Bangkok to negotiate with ISCAT on the establishment of the Center for the Asian Pacific Region so I went as an advisor to that delegation. That delegation negotiated -- Were you on that?

Q: No. It was Mohsen Esfandiyari. He was the ambassador there. Haleh Esfandiyari I think went from Tehran with you.

Reid: So that they as being the delegation negotiated with ISCAT and reached agreement with them. I was there only as an advisor. Having reached agreement, their concern was, again, that things would get done quickly. So rather than leaving it to ISCAT to produce the draft of the project document and then send it back to Tehran and so and so-forth, they asked me if I would stay behind and write it. So I did. I stayed on after that and produced a first draft. I worked with Bob Gazabckian in ISCAT and wrote the first draft of the project document. I left that with ISCAT to do what they will and then transmit it formally back to Tehran. I think roughly at that stage then I went back to Tehran for a while, and then I went to Adis Ababa. The point of Adis was that this was the regional ECA, the first regional UN commissioned center that had been established for women. I think you had previously been there to have a look at it. So I went there to see what their institutional arrangements were, what programs they had adopted, why they had adopted it; all those issues that come to mind when you're having to draft a project paper. So that was a very valuable exercise, but one in which I really did decide -- and came back and talked it over -- I thought that things needed to be done differently in the Asia and Pacific region. That historical, economic or social reasons for focusing on particular things on Africa was not necessarily the way to tackle that issue in the Asia and Pacific region. So then I was back in Tehran, and this was a very active time. I think round about the same time, first of all, I think there was a

delegation from New York led by Rasil Basu, as I recall, who came to negotiate with you on establishment of the International Center. Again, I found in that case that they had very set ideas about how they wanted the International Center to go, and that we, on our side -- you and I -- had very different ideas. That was not easy, I mean, that whole process of negotiating that through. I mean, really, you could see the tension start right from that first delegation from New York coming through Iran. Then, of course, at the same time there was the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women being held, by Ashraf or you?

Q: You attended?

Reid: I didn't go, no. No, my job was just to look at the papers and to start work on some of those things. So my entry into Iran, into Tehran, in those ways was "you got off the plane and started working" or got back on the plane again and went somewhere else to work. But, of course, the cultural entry was really very different. What I had done? I had traveled fairly widely, I suppose, in Third World and, of course, First World countries, but I certainly had never spent any time in an Islamic country and I'd never spent that much time in a country where I didn't have the language and I couldn't read the script. I mean, just to get around, to survive, all those were necessary. So it was a time of tremendous cultural dislocation. It was terrible. Sometimes, actually it was -- I was in the hotel for a long

time and in some ways that cushioned it because I had this mental image of myself as being surrounded by a bubble, an air lock, and when I got into the hotel it would expand to fit the hotel and I would move around freely. But then if I was in a taxi going from the hotel, and I was in the Intercontinental I think, down to Sazman-e-Zanan -- to the Women's Organization of Iran, I'd feel this air lock sort of close all the way in around me. I couldn't read a sign. I couldn't speak. I couldn't communicate. I didn't know anything. I couldn't read any body language; nothing; just nothing could I read. So this air lock would close all the way in and I would get down to the Women's Organization and then it would open in little pockets. I mean, because it always had to depend primarily on language, so your office would open up because we could speak in English and some of the others' offices that I began to meet we could speak. But all the other parts of the Women's Organization were really sealed off from me by this air lock. At that stage the only non-English speaking person, the only Farsi speaking person that got through to me was the tea man. He was obviously extremely concerned that here I was sitting in an office all by myself utterly unable to communicate with anybody, and so he came in at about fifteen minute intervals to offer me tea, talking to me in Farsi or not talking at all and just looking as if to say "Are you alright?".

Q: Did you get a chance to see much in the Organization and the work it was doing?

Reid: Ah, yes, and that was really interesting, also. I mean, at that time we had informal contact, but obviously my role was not to do with Iran, per se. It was in the international level. But you and I had a lot of contact and discussed things and what was most fascinating to me was, first of all, as we sat and talked it was clear to me that the analysis was very similar. I mean, I'd just come from a similar position in Australia. I'd ultimately come from very much as if I were a Minister in the way it was handled, and the analysis was similar. It was very interesting. I mean, you look down what the problems were, the problems arise. There are certain things that women need in order to be able to enter the world, I mean, in order to be able to make any choices in the world. That's going to include things like skills training or access to employment should they chose it, access to child care and a whole range of things. That sort of analysis that we'd gone through in Australia, it was very similar. I mean, you were doing exactly the same things with village women. Not just urban women, but village women in Iran. The example that really struck home to me at the time was child care. Okay. Sure. In '74 we dramatically changed. We had a preschool policy before then in Australia. Then we brought in this new child care policy, a multifaceted, multidimensional policy designed to assist women in their need, be it for occasional care or regular care, long term care, or whatever, as well as to assist the child be in an environment where it could develop properly and lovingly and warmly as a child. So that was

a dramatic change. So what did we do? Alright, yes. We got our budget allocation. We got our office of child care and all that sort of thing, but the way, on the whole, we decided to go about it was by making money available to community based groups who wanted to set up their own. What we did was we set up a family day care network so that those women who wanted to got the children in their own homes. We identified them. We paid them an agreed upon wage. We made sure that they were trained, minimally, but hygiene was foremost and all that sort of thing, and then we gave them support services. We gave them mobile toy libraries or women who would look after their children if they were sick, we encouraged them to take the children along to the preschools so the children, all children had access to preschools, not just children living at home. So that was one whole thing, and that was, if you like, where parents wanted their child to be in a house with a woman. Now, where parents wanted their children in child care settings, then primarily we did it in this community based way. We made money available. We polled for submissions. We were flooded with submissions. We checked them out and we funded them, and so the local communities started establishing all these. I went to Iran, and there's the same problem, same analysis, but there was just no way that that was the solution. Absolutely no way. It was a totally different community. Whatever the social or economic conditions for that sort of community based organization to spring into existence, or even setting up family based care with a support system, this was out of the question in this country. So watching you go through

from the analysis to the finding of the solution was an extraordinary experience for me because I suddenly learned the nontransferability of solutions and the need, therefore, to find your solutions in the conditions that applied there where the problem was. That's the exercise that you, as Minister in the Women's Organization in Iran, were going through. So those years, to me, were very exciting. I think, also the other thing that I found very impressive was through the women's centers that there was not this strict -- I mean, they really responded in a multifaceted way without a strict demarcation, and that there was simultaneously a lot of concern about these women's lives. Not just where they could get jobs, or whether you could train them in this, or what have you, but particularly these problems of maltreatment, the ways in which women were physically and in other ways maltreated there. So that part of the work became counseling and support services, etcetera. This is difficult to do, but at least there was some attempt to do something about it. There were enough success stories, I think, over the time that I was there, particularly where you had cases of just extreme maltreatment of women. The men had to account -- what were they called in the local courts?

Q: Family Courts.

Reid: Yes, you used to take them to the Family Courts. That's right. Which were later abolished [after the revolution]. So there was this beginning of a feel that brutality to women could

not be unlicensed. It was going to be limited, and that there would be retribution through the Family Courts. That, I think, was also an extremely significant change. So, I mean, from where I sat, what I saw, I guess was --

[end of side 1]

Reid: I think the other thing that really impressed me over that period -- I mean, this is if you like looking at the political and governmental processes. But there was an amazing strength in women. There was a pride and a strength. It's very difficult to, perhaps, capture well like this. But firstly, as I began to read back in the history of women I was amazed that in that society -- and I mean every day I saw manifestations of what that society was like in terms of how women were treated -- but even in a setting like that, there had been women who had been politically active since the last century and earlier, taking the streets in their veils to protest politically against tobacco laws. But also then in the early '20s -- No, '45. When was the lifting of the veil?

Q: '34.

Reid: '34. Okay, so in '34 it was decided that women should participate fully in the development of the country, and to do that they had to come out of their veils, and they did. This gave them -- I mean, in that culture in what it means to go

unveiled in that culture is to really be harassed sexually, but those women came out. So that when I got there there were women whose mothers had come out. So they would be the second generation of women who didn't wear the veil. That movement had been captured very beautifully in poetry. There's a woman who --

Q: Parvin E'tesami?

Reid: Okay, I think, yes. And that movement out of veils, onto the streets, into public spaces, into offices and things like this, without a veil, and with shoulders straight and back was an extraordinary -- Obviously, this permeated only to a certain extent, but nevertheless, that permeation was going further and further through the society, I felt, when I got there. Of course, it is true that in Islam there are many ways that women have rights that women outside of Islam don't have. Under Islam women have the right to retain their name, the right to maintain control over their own personal finances, etcetera, according to the Qur'an. I think that, in itself, brings a certain independence no matter what else is going on within the culture. So that I found a great strength in women and it was good. I mean, just going and talking or watching in people's homes was always a very pleasurable thing. Now, I think during those years that I was there, this pride, I think that your appointment, the work of Women's Organization, the role of the Shahbanu and Princess Ashraf in pushing women forward in different spheres, in different ways, the focus on education, literacy, girls in

school, the economic changes that anyway were forcing women out to work began to snowball. I just felt there was this tremendous taking off and so, of course, there was Damavand College which is a college to give women a tertiary education. There you could feel it. Going out there you really could feel a feeling of change that these young girls felt that the world was suddenly one which they could enter, and enter actively. This is, by now, I'm moving us from early '76 to late '77. It's not that long, is it? Late '77. Now, January '78, I by now had a bit of the language, but I'm not of the culture. I don't have the language well. I'm an alien, so I only see so much of what goes on. I don't fully understand. I didn't fully understand things. But January '78, it was the anniversary of lifting the veil. I had done some work at Damavand and I was asked to go as one of the key speakers that night for the ceremony marking and honoring the lifting of the veil. In the few days before that meeting the most extraordinary thing happened. Basically, briefly what happened was that the directive came from Key Imams --

Q: Ayatollahs.

Reid: Aytaollahs, thank-you. That no Iranian women was to appear unveiled on that stage, on that night to celebrate the lifting of the veil. Then there was this long toying and praying about whether I was going to or not going to and also the discussion about at what cost. If we disobeyed and we went ahead, what would happen? And all of a sudden we felt a fear of

a violent retribution. So at Damavand College that day we celebrated the lifting of the veil. I, of course, went unveiled and spoke about women and these changes, but all the Iranian women there were veiled and cowed, and it turned out afterwards, were indeed severely attacked. These were women who had been out of the veil probably since birth -- but at one stage one of the women had let her veil slip back. So it was as if we hadn't worn those veils, as if we hadn't cowed. The response was quite strong and brutal. So they, then, got a lot of criticism. That for me, in retrospect, signals the start of the revolution. I think for whatever reasons, I don't know how it came about, but there just came a time when the religious decided to start exerting brutal force to stop this pace of change for women. It was amazing.

Q: How would you relate, then, the revolutionary events? How close were you to those?

Reid: Back to the?

Q: Yes.

Reid: Help me out. I think the next significant change was there was a meeting with quote unquote at Qom, wasn't it?

Q: Yes. The uprising at Qom that resulted in a student being shot.

Reid: That's right. In a student being shot.

Q: Exactly. But what I wanted to ask you was did you feel during that period -- and you were there until after the revolution -- how much of the revolutionary events looked to you as if they were related to the role of women?

Reid: Good question. Okay. It seemed to me that there were, I think -- I mean, really interestingly enough, I do think that what stimulated the religious move then was what was happening to women. Women were just getting out of control; out of their control and traditionally they had controlled them through prayers and things like this, very much so. But women that they traditionally controlled were now demanding their rights. But at the same time, you had immense changes within the country. There had been just a dramatic increase in rural urban migration. The south of Tehran had expanded almost visibly before one's eyes. It began to be the case that men could not marry, could not take a wife, because they couldn't find a house to take one. Food prices were doubling. I mean, each week almost they were going up. People were beginning to talk -- Oh, and the services were totally inadequate. I mean, hospitals, schools, all those basic services were totally inadequate, particularly in the south. In that climate, then, one began to have to buy access to those services and people started complaining very bitterly about not being able to get their children into school unless they paid,

not being able to get service in hospitals unless they paid and so on. So that there was a very strong feeling of discontent in south Tehran. Now, this then, I think, became the instrument, the means by which the religious forced the revolution. What I saw them doing, the way I saw it was -- Now, this, if you like, is not women specific. The women were there and the women complained, but that was men and women complaining legitimately about the results of a very fast pace of development that they culturally had not kept up with. That just governmentally had not been kept up with. So you had legitimate complaints. But what happened to those complaints, as I saw it, was each Friday in the Mosque the religious would, starting with those complaints which were legitimate, about which people were angry, would whip up that anger; whip it up; up and up and up until it permeated that Mosque and then they turned it and they directed it against the Shah. In directing it against the Shah they had to accuse the Shah of something to justify that twisting, manipulating of legitimate anger to achieve their objective, which was to get the Shah out. One of the things they used was what had happened to women. So always, I mean, it was the Shah's policies on women, women in schools, so on and so-forth. There were other things, too. I mean, there was alcohol. Carter's visit came during this time and the Shah appeared on public television toasting Carter with alcohol. Disastrous, when the Mollahs were whipping everything up into a frenzy. So it was just something else. I think then that why -- One has to ask why did they move then, because Khomeini had been calling for this to happen for a

decade. Why then, and the answer to that is because there were just too many changes. It wasn't urban-rural changes or anything like this. It was women moving out and there was discontent. Legitimate, and it was whipped. It was whipped up, changed and twisted and directed against the Shah. With that people took to the streets and the burning and everything began. Of course, it became impossible to be a woman; a foreign women; a foreigner walking the streets. Of course, I lived up north and I worked way down south just after the bazaar and right next to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So over those months, after that Friday particularly I think -- Well, in fact, this is interesting. Alright, that's the macrocosm, but let me give you my microcosm because I'm not sure that I ever spoke to you about it. I lived up north. I, in fact, was sharing a house with an Australian diplomat, another woman. So there just were two of us in that house. I think it was around the time of Black Friday and I think that was about September. Everything had closed down and we were up home. Of course, a lot of my staff were women and non-Iranian women, and actually some visitors had come in. So it was a very tense time so I had decided to have everybody up for a meal, up to our house. I did and, of course, we had a meal and we were talking and we decided to put some music on and we decided we'd dance. So we rolled up the carpets and we danced, and we talked, and we laughed, and we interacted. So that was fine. Some guests stayed on over night. They decided not to go through the streets, to stay on. We got up the next morning and we sat up on the roof and had breakfast and drank juice and then

they went on home. Robin went to the embassy and that left me there. I was sitting out on the roof and I heard some commotion in the back streets. I went down and saw the people gathering around our back gate and they were effectively saying in Farsi -- what they said to me was, "I had to go and get my chador and come down to the street." There was a lot of them, but it wasn't ugly, but it was worrying. Alright. So I got my chador and I went out onto the street. What ensued was effectively a kangaroo court. Because we were two women living alone and men visited us we were accused of being prostitutes. We were obviously not Muslim and therefore we were filth. We had alcohol at parties. Now, all this going on in Farsi, and you have to remember the men are all around me and it's getting uglier and uglier. The women are in the background and they have tapes of Khomeini playing, and they put me on trial. I'm having to repeat what they're saying in my Farsi to try and make sure I was understanding. To cut a long story short, they got nastier and nastier and eventually they said if I didn't either convert to Islam and come with them to the Mosque five times a day, or leave the country by Moharram I would be murdered, I would be dead. Now, by the time they gave the sentence, everybody, the men -- It was so ugly. It was so absolutely ugly and I was surrounded. I couldn't get back to the house. Of course, there was nobody else around. I didn't know how to get out. I feared for my life then. The women were back in the second circle and I had this chador on and I thought, "I'm never, never, never going to get out of this." Eventually I tried to speak to the women and tried to move

towards the women and eventually got through the men to the women. They were still fairly ugly. But then my chador was not proper. I didn't have all those proper skills. But, anyway, I'd been under immense tension and I wasn't that concerned that my chador was just perfect for the setting. So I got some of the women to fix it up and that broke the ugliness. Then I held onto them and sort of forced them to walk with me to my back gate. That was September. So from then on they would often gather outside and they would chant or they would yell or they would do this or not. They would keep watch. They would be there all the time keeping watch. And we lived up on a hill. This is a personal story now. I'd be in my room at night and I had a balcony and I'd walk out and the lights of Teheran were down there and the sky had stars in it, this chant was just going up to the sky; up and up and up and up and up to the sky. I'd lie in bed, and I had a window at the back, every time my curtain moved I thought there was somebody there who was going to kill me. I mean, it was very tense. So that was all night. I got up very early in the morning. I had found out that our driver was one of the Khomeini's troops or whatever they were called. His cousin loved me. So the other guy had come in late to be the driver, he was training. He was one of the militia. Mr. Javaheri warned me that his cousin had said that he felt if you killed three foreigners then he would be marked for the revolution. So at six o'clock every morning this guy turns up at my gate and we picked up everybody on the way downtown, you're sort of having conversations thinking "I've got to establish

links with this man. I've got to do it for the safety of all of us at that center." So you had this stress all the way downtown. We got to town quite early because you had to get down there early. About nine o'clock, ten o'clock people would start moving up from the bazaar. They would surround that building and there'd be machine gun fire. We'd just stay inside. Late afternoon they would have swept right up through. Of course, all the banks, the furniture was emptied out, the pictures of the Shah, the streets were burning and people were whipped up by that stage. Every evening we had to take all the staff home and then I'd be the last one to be dropped. So you're driving through and eventually it ended up I had to wear a chador, keep my eyes down when we were in the middle of a crowd, because you were always in the middle of these crowds, riots, fires and there'd be chanting and everything else. So we worked our way all the way back up there. You'd get back up alive to the house and you'd get in the house and -- I mean, that was just how -- I think that was similar. If you were on the streets, of course, as a foreigner it was --

Q: Was your role in the Center, do you think instrumental in the way you were treated or just simply being a foreigner?

Reid: At home, no, I think it was just that I was a woman living alone and a foreigner. So I was non-Muslim and men came to my house. They were avidly conservative. They were following all those directives about the role of women. So that's why it was.

The revolution, then at that stage, just marched inexorbly on. There was certainly no turning back at that stage. I would have liked to move the center out of Iran earlier. I felt our lives were in jeopardy. But in the world of real politics the UN was not prepared to move any of its projects out at that stage because it would look as if it were making a political comment about the Shah. So we were kept there. We were the southern most UN project and the most vulnerable because we were all women, we'd been directly associated with the Shah's family, with Ashraf, while we were in the Women's Organization. So they were very tense times and it was just very tragic; very tragic seeing what was happening. Of course, part of what you were seeing was what was happening to the women. Even those same women who were quoting poetry and talking about their future, a very different future, those same women started going back to the veil. Eventually Pari Soltan-Mohammadi, who was the deputy director, and myself, I mean, Pari would have come, she would have been somewhere else: into an office or into a home or somewhere, all these women who formerly were so independent suddenly were appearing in veils. We started on a very informal project, but the aim was for Pari to talk -- not interview -- but to talk to as many of these women as possible and try to understand why they reverted to the veil. Something extraordinarily fascinating came out of that. That is, in every case, almost without exception, everyone of those women reported to Pari that she'd had a dream and in that dream she had been told to revert to the veil. The only variation on that theme was that in some cases the women

dreamt of Khomeini and it was Khomeini who told them to return to the veil. In other cases it was Allah. Either one or the other. All these women, who often were university trained or certainly secondary schooling trained, were independent often working women, and all of a sudden "I had a dream and now I wear the veil." Yes.

Q: Thank-you, very much, Elizabeth.

Reid: It's a pleasure. I'm sorry it's been so rushed.

Q: Thank-you.

End of Interview

REID, ELIZABETH