

ON ASSIGNMENT:

“The Current” in Afghanistan

Anna Maria Tremonti is the host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s program “The Current,” heard nationally on CBC Radio One at 8:30 a.m. For four days in September, “The Current” broadcast from Kabul. *Canada World View* asked Ms. Tremonti to share some of her impressions of the Afghan capital.

First impressions

As soon as we landed, as we actually touched down, there was a reminder of how much war this city has seen. The airport tarmac is absolutely littered with fuselage and remnants of planes that were bombed or had crashed. As you drive into the city, you drive by crumbling buildings. Everywhere you look there’s stuff that has fallen apart, and it’s clear that it’s been apart for a while. Right away you get the sense of a place that is very broken.

The mood of the city

At the same time, in the midst of all the crumbling, I got a sense of optimism. The markets are crammed and

life goes on. You see people putting a new window in a building that is still three-quarters crumbled. They’re creating their own little piece of shelter. You see people making do. You see optimism in the sense that they are getting on with their lives.



Anna Maria Tremonti in conversation with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The reconstruction process

The big worry that people in Kabul have is that we’ll leave too soon. People really feel that they were abandoned once, which is why the country descended to what it did. They don’t want to be abandoned again; they don’t want people to forget that they need help. The place is not secure. There are a lot of different ways this country could go; it really is on an edge right now.

The people of Kabul

There was nothing but a willingness to talk to me if I wanted to talk to them. Even the women in burqas, when I asked them why they were still wearing a burqa when they were no longer imposed on them by law, not one of them was hostile, not one of them refused to answer. All of them thought about it and explained. I spent a lot of time talking to people on the street, people who had better things to do with their time, quite frankly, than to indulge a Canadian journalist with some dumb questions. But they were always polite about it. I didn’t find that anyone was hostile to me for being a Westerner or for being a journalist.

A final word

For me, despite the devastation of the place, I could see how people fall in love with the city. I could understand the beauty that used to exist in this place. ♣

For a full transcript of this interview please see www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/canada-magazine.

To explore coverage of Afghanistan on “The Current” visit www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/afghanistan.html.

AFGHAN PRESIDENT VISITS OTTAWA

Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited Ottawa on September 27 for meetings with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham, Defence Minister John McCallum and Minister for International Cooperation Susan Whelan.

President Karzai acknowledged Canada’s significant contributions to Afghanistan in the areas of defence, development and diplomacy. At the same time, he stressed the need for continued, long-term assistance.

Speaking with the CBC, President Karzai noted that Afghanistan needs “continued, sustained international help.” Without that assistance, he said, “terrorism will keep affecting my country. It will keep making inroads into the peace and prosperity we’re trying to build for our people, and eventually it will threaten the whole campaign that we have internationally against terrorism. That affected the world two years ago in such a dramatic, sad way [and] might affect it again.... It’s not only for us... it’s also for the rest of mankind.” ♣