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**ANNE AARNES**

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### INTERVIEW

*Q: How about talking about your growing up and the influences that may have taken you to AID (United States Agency for International Development).*

AARNES: I was born in Summit, New Jersey, which is a suburb of New York City. My father was a physicist and mathematician; he worked for Bell Telephone Laboratories, which had recently moved from Manhattan to New Jersey. My mother was a homemaker. So, until I was 14 years old, I lived a quiet suburban life in New Jersey.

*Q: Not very international.*

AARNES: Not very international except that my parents loved to travel. Travel was always presented to my sister and me as a new adventure. They took us to Europe for two months when she was seven and I was six. We were among the very few kids in our school who had ever been as far away as Europe.

*Q: That was 1954?*

AARNES: Yes, less than ten years after the end of World War II. I remember driving around Germany and seeing bullet holes and other destruction in the buildings. There were still grim reminders.

After that trip, I went to public school in Summit through fifth grade, and then went to a private girls' school for four years, sixth grade through ninth grade. The girls' school, Kent Place, was quite traditional. It provided a good classical education, with a lot of English, a lot of Latin and not much in the way of sciences.

When I was going into tenth grade, my parents sent me to George School, which is a Quaker boarding school in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. They wanted me to have a broader education with more sciences. Going to George School was a completely new

life. First of all, I was out from under my parents' direct supervision, which is a wonderful thing for a teenager. Of course, as a Quaker boarding school, George School had extremely firm guidelines for the behavior of students.

*Q: Right. And George School was also a very progressive school.*

AARNES: Yes, it was very progressive. The George School environment was right in step with my parents' values. It was non-materialistic, accepting of differences, and socially active.

*Q: And the other thing, too, is this was the beginning of the '60s, and so the whole country was going through changes.*

AARNES: Yes. One of the things that had a huge impact on me, and nearly everybody else from that generation, was John F. Kennedy's election. I was 12 years old when he was elected. The hope and the inspiration and the belief in the importance of fighting for justice – that's what I always remember from that time. George School reinforced that hope and belief. It was a very inclusive environment.

*Q: And it was probably a more diverse student body than you had in Summit, New Jersey, I would guess.*

AARNES: Definitely. For its time, it was quite diverse, and it's far more diverse now. The school emphasized the values of integrity, commitment, compassion, tolerance, and respect for other people. They instilled the idea of working for something beyond your own interests and trying to help people who were in need. There was an openness and an interest in things that were happening in other countries.

*Q: So, that was a major inflection point for you?*

AARNES: Yeah, becoming more aware of and understanding the diversity of views and of people was a big development, and especially becoming aware that you can do something to help people and countries in need.

*Q: Right. Interesting. And in terms of a substantive interest, is that where you got your interest in politics? Or did that come later?*

AARNES: I got my interest in politics there and before. When I was 12, I put stickers for Kennedy on the cover of my notebook, and I wore Kennedy-Johnson buttons. In my eighth grade class in Summit, there were four of us who were Democrats, about 10 percent, and the rest were all Republicans. But in my sister's class, there were only two Democrats.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: As a senior in high school, I went on the senior class trip to Washington. It was 1965 and we were there in the first week of March, when there was a reenactment on

the steps of the Capitol of Lincoln's second inauguration. It was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that inauguration on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1865. We got to catch a glimpse of a lot of famous people, Robert Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, Everett Dirksen, and many others. My roommate's congressman arranged a meeting for us with Robert Kennedy just to say hello. He was on the Senate floor; he was chairing because he was a junior senator. He came out to say hello, and, of course, we were struck dumb.

*Q: Couldn't ask any penetrating questions.*

AARNES: Couldn't think of anything to say. We hadn't yet heard of talking points. I went on to college in Oberlin. I picked Oberlin because it was co-ed and service oriented, in addition to having a very strong academic reputation. The college has a long history of activism dating from its founding in 1833. In 1835, it was the first white college in the U.S. to adopt a policy to accept Black students. In 1841, it was the first college in the U.S. to grant bachelor's degrees to women in a coeducational program. It was a stop on the Underground Railroad and, in the 1960s, a lot of students went down south to work for voter registration. In the late 1960s, Oberlin was very political. I majored in political science and studied, in particular, political attitudes and voting behavior.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

AARNES: Later on, when I went to work for AID, I found my college work extremely relevant because many of the questions that we deal with in development are, in large part, politics with a small p – and sometimes a capital P. Also, questions of attitude and behavior change are part of nearly everything we do in development.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: For me, to come into AID with a sense of these questions and an interest in them made AID's work very compelling.

*Q: Did you get close to any of your professors? I mean was there a set of professors who really influenced you or was it less personality focused?*

AARNES: It was less personality-focused, at least for me. There were a few professors that I remember particularly, such as the political science professor who taught me in the methodology class about how to take surveys. In his urban politics seminar that I took later, I focused on how attitudes change in certain areas, who the opinion maker is, how that person gets his or her information and which way opinions move: are they going from the bottom up or the top down? Those were questions I'd never thought about.

I had a Soviet politics professor, a Hungarian, who became my advisor in the honors program. I found Soviet politics fascinating. And about 25 years later, when I went to Ukraine, much of it seemed familiar.

I had an excellent American history professor, and I took four semesters of American history. All of those classes built up my interest in what was happening in this country

and in others. I was very interested in how people come to believe and act the way they do.

*Q: So, you were a political science major. You studied behavior change and politics and I know that you went to AID fairly soon after you graduated. But just talk about what you thought you were going to be doing at the end of college.*

AARNES: I didn't grow up with a strong career orientation. My mother didn't have a career, although she had a number of jobs before she was married. She continued to do a lot of volunteer work and she was a full-time mother. That was typical for the mothers of most of my friends. When I got to college, though, I decided that I wanted to get a doctorate and teach political science in a university. University teaching was a fairly common goal among my friends. I was expecting to focus on American politics and voting attitudes and behavior.

*Q: So then what happened to keep you from doing that?*

AARNES: Well, early in 1969, in the last semester of my senior year, I decided, for several personal reasons, to find a job and work for a few years before going to graduate school. I expected to work for around four years, and then continue to pursue the plan of becoming a university professor. I moved to Washington partly because I thought that, as a political science major, I would be able to find a job there more easily than in some other cities.

*Q: How did you find out about AID?*

AARNES: I heard about AID just by chance. My sister had a friend who was working in Washington, and who suggested that I look at AID. So I made a preliminary trip to Washington in June, right after graduation, and called up the person whose name my sister's friend had given me. The person was Kay Patterson, in AID's central Office of Population. She interviewed me the next day – it was my very first job interview – and she said, we'd love to hire you. Kay Patterson and I agreed that I would begin work in September, after my sister and I returned from a two-month post-college trip to Europe.

In the interview, Kay Patterson told me I would need a security clearance to work in AID. She suggested that I fill out the forms right then, while I was sitting in the Office of Population, and deliver them to the security office so they could take my fingerprints and get the investigation started right away. So I got the forms together, which didn't take long, because I was 21 years old and hadn't ever done much except go to school. And then I dropped them off at the AID security office, which was in one of the building annexes near the State Department.

*Q: Where was the AID Office of Population located in 1969?*

AARNES: It was located in one of the old temporary Navy buildings that had been built during World War II. They were on New York Avenue, across 17th street from the old Executive Office Building, and across New York Avenue from the Corcoran Art Gallery.

OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance), and the Office of Food for Peace were also located in the same building as the Office of Population.

In early September 1969, after I came back from Europe, I moved to Washington for good and contacted Kay Patterson again in the Office of Population. She said, “Oh, wonderful, you’re back. Let’s see what we can do to bring you onboard.” I was put on a contract with a contractor, and I started work about three weeks later.

In the meantime, it turned out that I had gotten a top-secret clearance. I had no idea how unusual it was that the security clearance had been processed before anything else. I didn’t have a badge because I was a contractor, but I didn’t need a badge, in those times, to get in and out of the annex buildings. I started work in the Office of Population helping organize and distribute communications and materials.

*Q: Was that a GS (General Schedule) civil service position?*

AARNES: Well, first I worked as a contractor for five months, and then I applied for and got a GS job in the office as a GS-7 technical reports assistant. I developed a library of population materials and also sent information both to AID mission population officers and to people who wrote asking about population growth. Population was a new field at that time and the Office of Population had been started about two years earlier.

*Q: Who was the head of it at that time?*

AARNES: It was Reimert T. Ravenholt, Dr. Rei Ravenholt.

Rei was a public health doctor and the founder and head of AID’s Office of Population for about 10 years. He became something of a legend in AID. The goal of the Office of Population was to work with developing countries to lower the rate of population growth in the world. Rei was building the Office of Population staff as the program developed and received increasing amounts of funding. The population program and Rei had support far beyond AID. He had a brother and a sister who worked on the Hill and he had gotten a lot of support, especially from the Senate. He also received a lot of political support from other very prominent people, both Republicans and Democrats.

*Q: And he worked that system?*

AARNES: He did, and he had their firm support. There was quite a bit of autonomy in the program and in the office because he was not under the thumb of the head of the bureau.

*Q: Much less the head of the agency. But he didn’t flaunt his power.*

AARNES: No, but he did decide what needed to be done, and then moved forward. That was quite a contrast to the way the rest of the agency operated, I came to realize. And it was an astonishing contrast to what things are like today.

*Q: Yes, really.*

AARNES: Rei Ravenholt did truly have a vision and a conviction and absolute determination.

*Q: Right. And that might sometimes make him a difficult personality. But did you feel beleaguered within the agency? I mean, you clearly must have known that the rest of the agency was, at a minimum, resentful of the autonomy and the resources that you had.*

AARNES: I realized that there was some sense in the agency, outside the Office of Population, that Rei and the program were running roughshod over the rest of the agency, and that many people in the agency didn't agree with the program's approach. But that attitude didn't make much difference to me in the work I was doing. And I think that, at least in Washington, it generally didn't make much difference to the rest of the population staff. We just kept right on going because we could and we were committed to moving forward.

Rei's approach to the program was controversial in large part because it was a supply side approach. He was convinced that women and men in developing countries would want to practice family planning if contraceptives were easily available to them. He was determined to cut through bureaucratic delays and get programs moving that could distribute contraceptives effectively.

*Q: That must have rubbed the rest of the agency the wrong way.*

AARNES: Yes, it did. Many people in USAID were skeptical that family planning programs could succeed in countries where the level of development was low. The development literature generally held that the overall level of development in a country, measured through indicators such as education, health, GDP per capita and others, was the key determinant of fertility, and that improving those indicators was essential to the success of any family planning efforts. It seemed to irk a lot of people that Rei and his staff didn't coordinate or collaborate much with AID's programs in other sectors. As I remember it, the way their attitudes tended to be expressed was along the lines of, "That arrogant so-and-so and his band of true believers are off doing their own thing, and they don't listen to anyone else."

It's important to note, also, that health sector professionals in AID were generally not strongly supportive of the population program. Ministries of Health in developing countries worldwide weren't very supportive either. They were often exceptionally slow to accept family planning as a health measure and integrate it into their programs. Some AID population officers have speculated that perhaps part of the reason for that was that family planning didn't carry much prestige in the sector. It's a low-tech public health measure that focuses particularly on women, and it can be politically sensitive. Those might be among the reasons it took so long for the health profession to support family planning.

*Q: So, were there any staff in the Office of Population that questioned Dr. Ravenholt's*



*views and the approach he laid down?*

AARNES: Most of the staff were very supportive. Rei didn't tolerate staff who openly opposed his approach. Of course, very few leaders in any sector would tolerate strong dissent. He was very critical of staff that he thought were weakening programs by bringing in extraneous factors. He wanted to keep the focus clear. Staff who didn't see things so clearly tended to find other jobs.

*Q: And were there field officers that came into conflict with the Office of Population? I'm just wondering*

AARNES: Some did, although not many. In the mid-to-late 1970's, some field officers argued with Rei about what would be a realistic approach and pace of population programs, given the economic, cultural, and political environment in their countries. And as time went on, some field officers clashed with him about the importance of their also addressing other determinants of fertility, like education for girls. Rei refused to consider whether the population program and funds should be used to support these programs in other sectors.

But in general, the Office of Population had good relationships with AID population officers in the field. In fact, the principal home-base connection for field officers was with the Office of Population, not with their regional bureaus. I think they must have had a hard time with their ambassadors.

*Q: Right. Or their mission directors.*

AARNES: Or their mission directors. I wasn't as conscious of that because I hadn't served in a mission, but I was aware of crankiness in some cases. For some mission directors, this appeared to be based on misgivings about the program's supply-side

approach, and some were irritated at having the program forced on them. Some ambassadors were wary of having AID-funded family planning activities in their countries because family planning could be politically controversial, and they didn't want to push it too fast. Population and family planning were new topics for US foreign assistance, and many people, particularly non-AID officers, were embarrassed to talk about it. It was said that Rei Ravenholt, when he was having dinner with the US ambassador to an important Middle Eastern country in the mid-1970s, dumped a bag of condoms on the table.

*Q: That must have stopped the conversation. So, you joined the Office of Population when it was just a few years old. How many staff were there?*

AARNES: Probably around 30. Not many. It was a collection of people from many different places. The chief and deputy chief of my division had both come from USDA (US Department of Agriculture). A Census Bureau employee came to the Office of Population on a detail that lasted at least 10 years, and so forth. It was an eclectic group and it was growing fast. The staff eventually grew to about 100.

*Q: And from the beginning did you have Foreign Service officers? Often when you have a start-up you use other mechanisms, RSSAs and PASAs and IPAs and GS, and it's only slowly that the Foreign Service take positions.*

AARNES: There weren't many Foreign Service officers there on my first day in the office, but they started to come in within the first few months. What Rei had done, when there was an agency-wide RIF in 1968, was to gather up a lot of young officers, both GS and Foreign Service, and send them to get Masters degrees in population studies. A number of them went to the University of Chicago, and others went to the University of North Carolina and other schools. They were all slated to join the Foreign Service.

*Q: Did that protect them from the RIF?*

AARNES: Yes, it protected them from the RIF. It also created a cadre of young field officers who were trained in population.

*Q: Right. Interesting.*

AARNES: By the time I joined AID, most of them had finished their degrees and were going overseas. It was an excellent result: it provided the agency overseas with population officers who had good technical training, and it gave the Office of Population strong connections with the missions.

When I think about the office as a whole, it seems to me that Rei Ravenholt established a sound structure for the office that stayed in place, with very little tinkering, for 20 years. The structure was particularly effective because it integrated technical and program aspects. So it included operational support, like contraceptive supplies, training, and communications, and it also included biomedical and program research, policy, and demographic analysis. This gave the overall population program a strong intellectual base and up-to-date knowledge of the population field as it was developing.

*Q: So did this produce some important results?*

AARNES: Yes, there were some extremely valuable results that came out of the office. The office was a major partner, perhaps the major partner, in helping countries develop successful family planning programs. And another kind of example, which still has global impact, is the World Fertility Survey, which evolved into the Demographic and Health Survey, the DHS. The DHS is still used today by governments and organizations all over the world. It's the gold standard of a tool that produces useful, reliable data that are comparable worldwide. The Office of Population succeeded in this because they put a continuous effort of 20 years or more into defining the variables and figuring out what issues needed to be tackled. The DHS data provide excellent information for governments and researchers about program needs, how to understand what's happening on the ground, and how to make the programs better.

Do you remember the RAPID presentations that were developed in the 1970s? RAPID was the acronym for Resources for Awareness of Population in Development.

*Q: Yes.*

AARNES: The RAPID project was an outgrowth of the data work, and it was a valuable tool for AID's work in the population sector for decades. I used RAPID in Pakistan when I was posted there in 1989. It was an incredibly effective way to show policy makers the data from their own country, and the implications of rapid population growth for the country's development and the well-being of its people. Very often, in working with the programs, the views and interests of the top policy makers are not the same as the views of the people at the bottom. But often, some people at every level and certainly as you get down further, for example to the district level, are really committed to helping the people of their country. So the data that AID provides through RAPID and other programs are crucial to support those committed people and to help convince the others.

*Q: Let's see. Remember, it was '73, '74. The small is beautiful concept had become very popular, and there was a focus on the poorest of the poor. We can talk about other trends in AID theory. I'm wondering how much of that affected the Office of Population when you were there. Or were you insulated?*

AARNES: We were insulated from the movement to some extent, but the operations research program that the Office of Population was pursuing played a major role in helping AID, as well as the countries and donors, develop a better understanding of what the needs and interests of women and men are with respect to family planning. The DHS was also very important in this. I think there's a connection with the basic human needs focus in AID. During those years, in a number of sectors, AID and the development community around the world got a much better understanding of how to find out about people's views and needs, and how to work at the community and household level.

*Q: Right. Clearly, because with the policy group you were also working with government officials, too. And they often had no idea what the needs were at the community level.*

AARNES: Exactly.

*Q: Do you remember having any conflicts when you were in the Office of Population or did it really work like a well-oiled machine?*

AARNES: It definitely worked as a team. The staff in general were deeply committed and morale was high. But Rei had very strong views. He wanted things the way he wanted them and he didn't want anyone to get in the habit of saying that problems were complicated and couldn't be solved right away. He wanted things done and done now and he wanted the information to be positive, not negative. In my job, there wasn't much that came in conflict with Rei's views. But there was a certain tension in working in an environment where we had to be careful not to say or do anything Rei might not agree with.

Many people who worked in the population field or a related field may remember that Rei had a formula, early on, to determine how many pills and condoms should be available in each country that was beginning to establish family planning programs. The

office's commodities staff would then send them out to the missions. It's certainly true that contraceptive supplies are essential for a family planning program, and couples can't be expected to adopt family planning effectively if effective contraceptive methods are not available. But there were cases where the assumptions of this formula didn't hold and where countries didn't have the resources or the capability to manage the programs.

*Q: How did he deal with failure or with problems like that? I mean, I do remember him saying and probably more than once, women are like chickens and contraceptives are their feed and you just put them out there and they'll eat it.*

AARNES: Well, I didn't ever hear him say that. But clearly any assumption that women would automatically use a contraceptive if it were put in front of them was disproven very quickly. There were stories of stocks of contraceptives being wasted in some countries because the programs weren't attracting and keeping enough clients.

But, first of all, the Office of Population's efforts were not at all limited to just contraceptive supplies. The approach included training, outreach and communications, research, and work with policy makers – areas that are essential for family planning programs to reach women and men effectively.

One way Rei dealt with continuing low contraceptive prevalence in some countries was to introduce an operations research program. This program began in the early 1970s and was run by the research division, which worked with AID mission population officers to develop country operations research projects. The projects were intended to demonstrate

to host governments and others, including the global development community, that women would adopt family planning even if they were poor and illiterate. They also contributed a lot to the population sector's understanding of how family planning program workers could be more acceptable and effective in delivering services to women, what kind of information women needed, and where and how the services could be provided so that women would be able to access them. The information from these projects also helped practitioners figure out better how to assess the level of interest and calculate the quantity of contraceptives needed.

*Q: Overall, do you think Ravenholt's leadership made an important contribution to AID?*

AARNES: Yes, I do. Ravenholt could be brusque and intimidating sometimes. On the other hand, I think that without his drive and sense of mission, AID's population program would not have succeeded. Now, fifty years later, the population program is often cited as one of AID's big successes. But in the first couple of decades, there were enormous barriers, in addition to bureaucratic hurdles and the usually very slow pace of much government work. There were a great many people, as you probably remember, who thought the subject of family planning was embarrassing, and they didn't want to be a part of it at all. There were also people who thought that family planning was too sensitive and too political for the U.S. to talk about or to urge other countries to provide. Those people, surely, don't know how essential spacing and limiting births is to protect the health of women and children. They must not have known what the human cost was

when safe family planning was not available.

*Q: I suspect not. It was a time when I think there was the sense that you just get the economy moving and everything else falls into place.*

AARNES: Right. However many years it takes to do that.

*Q: Yes. And eventually it trickles down to communities, or that was the belief.*

AARNES: Right. A major development in the population field was the realization of how important it was, in many countries, for service providers to go to visit women in their homes, because women often can't leave their homes in very poor and conservative countries.

One early project was Concerned Women for Family Planning, which was an NGO (non governmental organization) that was founded in Bangladesh in the 1970s. In this NGO, women worked in the slums in Dhaka. They went door to door talking to the women they met and explaining family planning to them. They talked with the women about what contraceptives the women might be interested in, and they could often provide the contraceptives right then. Concerned Women was still going in 2000, when I was posted in Bangladesh. It was a tremendous advance in learning how to reach women and provide help that the women need and want, in a way that is appropriate.

*Q: Right. The idea of community outreach workers is so accepted now. But it wasn't then.*

AARNES: Another important breakthrough was when focus groups began to be used to look at these questions, and to find out what was most important to women, and what different kinds of messages meant to them.

*Q: Right. Well, borrowing from market research in the U.S.*

AARNES: There have been a lot of developments. With Rei Ravenholt, he was probably learning along the way as well. He was a strong personality with strong convictions about what needed to be done. But he also set up a structure which caused people to learn, and to translate what was learned into programs.

*Q: And ultimately his strong personality and his insistence on independence probably took him down but what he left in place is something that carried on for decades afterwards.*

AARNES: Right. It worked out to be very much to the advantage of AID, and, most important, of women and families in developing countries.

*Q: Okay. We are resuming our conversation with Anne Aarnes. And Anne, let's talk about the 1970s and '80s.*

AARNES: I joined the Office of Population in 1969, right out of college, and I worked there until December 1976. For the first couple of years, I was in charge of sending out

materials to field officers and also starting a population library. The collection that was developed was useful to the staff for ten or fifteen years, and then was absorbed into a new agency information center.

After a couple of years, I moved to a different job in the communications division. My job was to help develop and manage new projects to reach women by working with women's professional organizations that had networks of contacts with women in developing countries.

To extend the reach of family planning information and services to more women, the Office of Population had hired a consultant, a retired State Department employee who had experience working with women's organizations. She identified two organizations that had good networks and that were interested in working with AID on family planning. One of the organizations was the International Confederation of Midwives, ICM, which is headquartered in London. ICM had contacts particularly in former British colonies and other developing countries where professional nurse midwives could be trained up to the standard of British nurse midwives, who are highly trained professionals. ICM had many contacts with midwives in Francophone African countries as well. The other organization the consultant identified was the American Home Economics Association, AHEA. They had a network of contacts with women from developing countries who had gotten home economics degrees in U.S. universities.

*Q: Why were those two organizations chosen?*

AARNES: Midwifery and home economics were two professions that focused on the well-being of women and families. ICM and AHEA were also very open to the idea of broadening their fields to include family planning. The Office of Population's goal in working with ICM and AHEA was to help them incorporate family planning information and, where appropriate, services, into their professional responsibilities. Both projects continued for almost ten years. They were good efforts, although not completely successful, to reach women and to improve their understanding of family planning and how it could help them and their families.

*Q: Were there other people working on other organizations or were those just the two that were selected?*

AARNES: Those were the two women's professional organizations that were selected at that time. At that stage, AID's population program was exploring a number of different means of delivering family planning information and services. There were large NGOs that AID worked with, that had networks around the world and worked with local women's organizations. Those local organizations were very effective in providing family planning information and services.

*Q: Right. What do you think were the reasons that the projects you managed with home economists and midwives weren't as successful as you had hoped?*

AARNES: We came to realize that the AHEA project was unlikely to have more than

moderate success because the home economics profession was not suited to developing the capability to deliver family planning information as an important part of their profession. The profession, worldwide, was not strong or large enough to take on another major task, and it didn't have support for that from major institutions, such as ministries of agriculture, that traditionally hired home economists.

With the International Confederation of Midwives, it functioned well as the headquarters of midwifery organizations worldwide, but it had little capability beyond being a coordinating organization. It was useful as a means of informing the top layer of midwives, but it didn't have the capacity to go beyond that so it was not a very effective means of working with trained midwives to actually provide family planning information and services on the ground.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: So after about three years in that job, I moved to the Office of Population's Near East/South Asia division, which was in charge of backstopping bilateral population programs in the region. I was the AID/Washington backstop for Morocco and Tunisia.

*Q: So, at that time the Near East Bureau and the Asia Bureau didn't have their own population officers?*

AARNES: There were population and health officers in the regional bureaus for a while. Then in 1972 the responsibility and staff for backstopping bilateral population programs were shifted to the Office of Population, as part of a larger agency reorganization.

*Q: Did that cause some stir in the regional bureaus?*

AARNES: Yes, although I'm sure I was not aware of most of it. But in my experience in AID throughout my career, that could be a successful model for providing support to the field for sector programs. By backstopping bilateral population programs through a strong central technical office, we could draw easily on all the technical resources of the central office. This arrangement also made the concerns of the missions very clear to all the technical divisions in the office. So the technical side and the field side were exceptionally well integrated. There wasn't the split between the field and the technical sector offices in Washington that was the rule for decades. We were all on the same team. I think the field missions were satisfied with it also.

*Q: Right. So, Morocco and Tunisia.*

AARNES: Tunisia was one of the early success stories in the population field. The Tunisian government's population program had a dynamic and politically well-connected director, and the government had also taken some policy steps to encourage smaller family size.

*Q: Bourguiba, I guess, was the Tunisian president at that time?*

AARNES: Yes, it was Bourguiba. By contrast, Morocco had a separate population

ministry, but the program didn't have strong political support and it was more difficult to carry out a program within Morocco's more conservative political and social culture.

*Q: Right. Did you go to Morocco and Tunisia a fair amount in that job?*

AARNES: I went once a year each year, and I was in very close touch with the missions all the time.

*Q: For history's sake, explain how you were in touch. This was pre-email, obviously. How did you communicate?*

AARNES: We communicated by cable and airgram frequently. We also communicated by phone about once every two weeks. Fortunately, the phone systems in Morocco and Tunisia worked well enough so that this was possible. In other countries, such as Nepal, the mission had to place the call and it could take a couple of days to go through.

*Q: Right. In addition to being 12 hours or something off.*

AARNES: Yes, and Morocco and Tunisia were only five or six time zones away. But we were not accustomed, as we are now, to daily communications with the missions.

The division chief that I worked for in that job was Bob Grant. He was a very experienced and savvy officer in the senior ranks of the Foreign Service. He had been overseas working in U.S. foreign assistance programs since about 1947 in Japan.

*Q: So, he was pretty long in the tooth.*

AARNES: He was only in his early 60s, but that seemed old to me at that time. He was thoroughly experienced with the way programs ran in different sectors and the way missions ran.

*Q: An early mentor really. Did he recruit you or how did you come to his division?*

AARNES: The functions of the Office of Population communications division, where I had been working, were merged into the training division, so the communications staff dispersed and I was selected to go to work on Tunisia and Morocco.

*Q: And then you lucked out with this wonderful mentor.*

AARNES: Yes. I watched how Bob Grant navigated smoothly among our counterparts, including country desk officers and office directors in the regional bureaus, the technical divisions in the Office of Population, the Office leadership, and the population officers – and mission directors – in the missions. He was always thorough, straightforward, tactful, calm, and prepared. Bob also made sure I had opportunities to see how a whole program, with all its pieces, worked or didn't work, and how everything fit together.

*Q: Great.*



AARNES: We had to undertake a major effort to redesign the program in Morocco because the project was about to end and close up shop, even though contraceptive prevalence in the country was only about five percent. Morocco's population at that time was growing at over 3 percent per year.

*Q: Then why was AID's support going to close down?*

AARNES: The mission had designed its population assistance with the thought that the Moroccan government would be able to operate population programs without outside help, once a separate building for the population ministry was created. But the ministry was still extremely weak. A reorganization in AID probably also had something to do with the recognition that Morocco's family planning program was unlikely to flourish by itself. Responsibility in AID for overseeing assistance needs in the Maghreb countries had just been moved from the Africa region to the Near East/South Asia region, so Morocco stood out among the Near East countries as having a very weak family planning program.

*Q: Interesting. So what could you do from Washington to get the program moving?*

AARNES: We organized an external evaluation of the program that was about to end, and then we found a strong, experienced AID population officer, Bill Trayfors, who was willing to go to Morocco. He developed good collegial relationships with the head of the Moroccan government's family planning program and with the AID mission director in Morocco to support continuing and strengthening AID's population assistance.

The Office of Population also worked with mission population officers in both Morocco and Tunisia to develop operations research projects. These projects tested whether women would accept family planning if female field workers went directly to their homes and provided information and contraceptive supplies. The projects in both countries demonstrated that, even in very poor, conservative areas, women were interested in practicing family planning to space and limit the number of children they had. This finding was very important in strengthening the governments' support by showing that family planning was acceptable in their cultures and that programs could work, and the projects also helped program workers understand their environment better.

*Q: Right. Well, I'm just judging at the time it was a focus on the poorest of the poor so the issue of how you reach the rural poor was on everybody's mind. And I guess it was also the era of the KAP (knowledge, attitudes, and practice) surveys, understanding what people knew and what their attitudes are and was also part of what we were trying to figure out. I don't think I've heard anyone say KAP survey.*

AARNES: I haven't heard that term for decades. We're still trying to find those things out, although now I think we know better how to look for the right information and understand what is most important.

*Q: Yes.*

AARNES: I worked in the Office of Population until the end of 1976, which was about seven years since I had joined AID. By the end of '76, I reached a sort of personal turning point. I had just finished a Master's degree in political science at George Washington University, and I had also become very interested in continuing to work in the field of development. I realized that it would be important to get broader experience in the agency and to find out more about how other assistance programs worked. I realized that if I stayed in the Office of Population much longer I would probably be spending the rest of my career there and wouldn't have acquired broad enough skills and experience to work anywhere else. I could also see that in the Office of Population, the way things were in those days, the prospects for me as a woman to rise to more senior positions in the office were slim.

*Q: So, all of the division chiefs were probably men?*

AARNES: They were all men. There were a few women in non-secretarial jobs. There was a higher percentage of professional women in the Office of Population, and also in the Office of Health and the Office of Education, I think, than in most of the rest of the agency. But that didn't add up to very many women, and only a tiny percentage were

division chiefs or deputy office directors or office directors. So, I left the Office of Population in December of 1976. In the next four years I had four jobs in three different bureaus.

*Q: Where did you go first?*

AARNES: First, I moved to the Asia Bureau for a job in the program office, in its Plans Division. I worked on food aid issues as well as population and health issues.

*Q: So you got some broader exposure. Did you have a chance to travel in the region?*

AARNES: Yes, I did. A few months into my job in the Asia Bureau's program office, I traveled to Pakistan on TDY as the bureau representative on an agency-wide team. We were charged with consulting with the Pakistan mission on the mission's proposed new population sector strategy. The mission wasn't pleased that AID/Washington was sending a team to question their work. Their greeting was along the lines of, "Who are you to raise meaningless questions and tell us what to do? We know what we're doing." And they had a good point. But the mission's proposed new strategy had raised concerns in the central technical bureau and in PPC (Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination) because it was well-known in development circles that Pakistan's family planning program had not been a success. The Government of Pakistan had had a population policy for 10 years and a family planning program for longer than that, but it had never made much progress. The program's failure was particularly notable because Pakistan had signed the UN declaration of world leaders on population in 1967.

*Q: Can you explain what that declaration was about?*

AARNES: The declaration was signed by the heads of state of 30 countries. It recognized

that population is a very important aspect in countries' development and in their development planning. It said that it was the right of families to decide the number and spacing of their children, that it wasn't anyone else's right, and that the purpose of family planning was to advance human rights. U.N. Secretary General U Thant said, in connection with the declaration, that the availability to every family of information and services to determine the size and spacing of their family is a basic human right and is essential to human dignity.

*Q: So, did the U.S. take a lead in promoting that international agreement?*

AARNES: It was an international effort. John D. Rockefeller III, who was Chairman of the Board of the Population Council, took the lead in collecting signatures of some heads of state after the declaration was drafted. At the presentation of the declaration to the Secretary General, the Colombian and British ambassadors spoke on behalf of the signatories.

*Q: Okay. So what had happened with Pakistan's family planning program?*

AARNES: Pakistan's program had languished for years for several reasons. Pakistan was a very conservative Muslim culture. The status of women was appallingly low. And Pakistan's political establishment didn't give priority to population and family planning. But the government had a very ambitious policy, so they kept issuing new strategies and ambitious new program plans.

*Q: It all looked good on paper.*

AARNES: It did, but the Pakistan government didn't put much push behind them. The population ministry was separate from the health ministry, and both of them were very weak. They didn't have the personnel or the training they needed, or the management skills or resources.

Our team from AID/Washington happened to come to Pakistan just as a volatile political situation was developing. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the prime minister, was facing growing opposition. There was a great deal of tension and violent demonstrations every day. Bhutto had turned on the U.S. He was trying to stay in power by rallying the Pakistani people against a supposed threat from outside. About two months later, Bhutto was overthrown in a military coup. The AID mission in Pakistan continued until 1979, when it was closed after the embassy was overrun and burned by a mob.

*Q: I didn't realize that you had so many contacts with Pakistan but you've basically known this country for 40 plus years. So, does anything strike you as being very different now from when you saw it in the early '70s?*

AARNES: Well, some things are the same, but there are some important changes. The problems we were seeing in the program, such as weak political commitment to actually carry out their population policy, weak management, lack of adequate trained staff, lack of appropriate field workers, difficulty reaching women – those problems have persisted

and they're certainly not unique to Pakistan. Those are problems worldwide. There wasn't enough explicit recognition of them in the 1970s, at least not in the formulation of the population program. There was a heavy emphasis on simply distributing contraceptives, and the issues involved in improving other parts of the program perhaps didn't get enough attention. The difficulties of carrying out a family planning program in such a conservative culture, as well as relying on the government to provide services, needed to be faced realistically. These issues were mentioned in reports year after year, but there wasn't a concerted effort to address them. Progress was possible during periods when there was a steady focus and continuity of effort over a number of years. But, given Pakistan's ever-changing domestic political situation, the Government of Pakistan was seldom able to maintain a steady effort. And AID certainly didn't maintain a steady effort. It has opened and closed its Pakistan mission three times over the past few decades. But I think that the Pakistan government has become a good deal more serious and effective now about what needs to be done in population and family planning than it was in the 1970s. And the program has moved forward.

*Q: And I'm imagining, also, that back in the '70s there weren't that many FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) who were sort of senior technical people whereas today and even for the last 20 years you have Pakistanis with superb training and experience.*

AARNES: There are more Pakistani institutions now than there used to be. Some of them were beginning to operate when I went to Pakistan in 1988, in my first posting as a Foreign Service officer. There have always been some extremely capable people in Pakistani institutions, and there are more now. I think there is more focus and continuity of effort now on getting the population program to move forward, as well as fitting the program to the culture.

*Q: Right. And I think you're maybe recalling a time when we thought development was a lot easier. I mean, we certainly all laughed and said there's no silver bullet, but there was this sense that if you just get this, this and this right, you'll have it.*

AARNES: Right. It turned out that reality was more complex, and it would always keep those silver bullets from working the way we had thought they would. I agree that it's critical to find some things that will make a difference in the short-term. For example, it was essential to have an effective immunization program even before the ministry of health was able to operate at a good overall standard of quality and efficiency. But while the immunization program was going on, it was important to recognize how weak that health structure was overall, and maintain a continuous effort to strengthen it. AID lost so much of its development efforts in Pakistan because the agency had to keep closing down and then reopening its programs. That was inevitable, given the difficult political relationship, but it was the people of Pakistan who were probably hurt the most by our having to shut down programs so often.

*Q: Or changing program focus.*

AARNES: Right, changing program focus abruptly could be equally damaging.

So, after eight months in the Asia Bureau's program office, I was recruited to the Bangladesh desk as the assistant desk officer. At the time, Bangladesh was one of AID's largest bilateral programs. Working on the country desk was an excellent chance to learn how mission programs and strategy come together and how missions work, with the support functions as well as the technical functions. The Bangladesh mission staff was very strong too. Joe Toner was the mission director. He saw that I was a young, eager but inexperienced assistant desk officer, so he was careful to include me in issues and to explain things to me. He had superb judgment on programs, and on management and policies. He held his staff to a high standard, but still gave them room to perform. He was calm, firm, never self-aggrandizing. His staff liked and respected him tremendously.

*Q: And he was very clear about what he expected of a desk officer?*

AARNES: Oh yes. And we would have done anything to help him.

Priscilla Boughten was the office director. She was the only female office director in the Asia Bureau and one of the only female officer directors in the agency at that time. The office covered Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. She was a wonderful role model. Did you ever know her?

*Q: Not really but I knew her reputation, I feel as though I do know her because people have said such wonderful things.*

AARNES: They're all true, too. One of the things I remember was that, as one of my colleagues noted, Priscilla never said more than she knew. There was no hype and no pretense. She expressed things simply and clearly. For example, I learned that a written answer to a congressional question shouldn't be fancy, it should be clear. Priscilla had strong credibility agency-wide. She was always straightforward, as well as enormously knowledgeable and always fully prepared.

*Q: So, another good mentor for you.*

AARNES: Yes. Priscilla made a point of having lunch with various staff members from time to time. She was about 13 years older than I was, so she had been very successful professionally at a time when it was even harder for women to succeed in the workplace. It was quite customary for women to sit at the back of the room in any meeting and not be given a chance to say anything. It was also normal for women to hesitate to say anything because they thought their comments and questions might be stupid. Priscilla told me that, in the first few years of her career, she used to hesitate to ask about anything when she was in a meeting because she thought everyone else must understand it already. But over time, she said, she realized that her questions weren't stupid or obvious. She said, "Now when I go into a meeting or in any kind of discussion, if I don't understand something, I figure it's very likely that somebody else doesn't either, so I'll always ask the question." As a manager, Priscilla was friendly, respectful, and focused. She held her staff to a very high standard. She was a model for me for how to be supremely effective by being straightforward, dignified, and calmly assertive.

*Q: How long did you work in the Asia Bureau?*

AARNES: Almost two years. The late 70s in AID/Washington were a time when there were good job opportunities. So after a year on the Bangladesh desk, I was recruited to go to PPC (Policy and Program Coordination Bureau). I worked in the Policy Development and Program Review office, in the division that covered health, population, nutrition, education and 104(d). I was the PPC representative at agency meetings on programs in those sectors. Alex Shakow was the head of the bureau. He was another central figure in AID.

*Q: Ah, yes.*

AARNES: Alex was incredibly bright and a good manager, deeply knowledgeable about development, with an exceptional strategic sense. PPC was a key player in shaping the agency's policy and strategic directions.

*Q: Well, at that time, I think, the budget function was also in the policy bureau so it made it very, very powerful.*

AARNES: Right, it led the development of a coherent set of strategic priorities for the agency, and the budget went to those priorities, by and large. I enjoyed working with the staff in PPC very much. There were some strong, capable women in the bureau, and two of the stars were in my division: Barbara Herz, the chief, and Ann Van Dusen, in charge of 104 (d).

*Q: Was it ever awkward being on the PPC side of the table at program reviews with your former colleagues in the Office of Population? Was it adversarial at all?*

AARNES: No, it usually wasn't adversarial. But the general impression about PPC, in the Office of Population and in some other parts of the agency, was that PPC was somehow the hostile power, and totally unnecessary. But I quickly came to understand that it was absolutely necessary. In PPC, I worked closely with the population and health officers in other bureaus, including the Office of Population. We had all worked together for years and were on good terms. There were a few things we disagreed on, but not many. A lot of what my office in PPC was doing was to make sure that the rest of the agency knew how important these sectors were and had integrated them into their strategies and programs with more than lip service, and with the quality and foundation they needed to make them effective.

*Q: So, explain 104(d). You said that was part of the focus of your office in PPC. I think a lot of people don't have a clue what it is.*

AARNES: 104(d) was part of the legislation of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1977. It said that AID should pay attention to and support understanding of other determinants of fertility, along with assistance for family planning. It meant understanding how factors such as education, the health of women and children, the status of women, agricultural production, and so forth, had an impact on fertility; and, when appropriate, designing

programs in these sectors that might impact attitudes about desired family size. 104(d) also directed that population programs should be coordinated with programs intended to improve maternal and child health, nutrition, and the well-being of the poor.

*Q: Good. It sounds unobjectionable. However....*

AARNES: It does sound unobjectionable, but many supporters of AID's population program saw it differently. There was always a budget tension within the agency. Among devotees of the population sector, there was a sense that part of the reason other sectors were so supportive of 104(d) was that they thought they could get some of the population funding for their sectors. And in the population sector, the concern was that the 104(d) legislation might detract from the focus on family planning services, where AID could most effectively make a difference in population growth. The Office of Population's concern that the 104(d) legislation might lead to a raid on the population budget was the kind of budget concern that is normal in any bureaucracy, and the anxiety about what might happen to the population program wasn't totally unreasonable. In any case, 104(d) activities received almost no funding at all. Over the next decade, I think the determinants of fertility became a lot clearer and the impact of these other factors on fertility became better understood.

*Q: Right. So, I think it was part of this growing realization of the complexity of any program but what influences the success of a population program is a host of social concerns.*

AARNES: Yes.

*Q: And so, a supply-driven program only will get you some of the way.*

AARNES: Well, the experience over some decades has been that a supply-driven approach can succeed, even in very poor environments. Finding out how to provide contraceptives to women in ways they could actually access them was crucial. This was particularly important in very conservative cultures. Advances in other development sectors, particularly education for girls, as well as overall improvements in the status of women, can also have an impact on lowering the birth rate.

*Q: Right. All right, so were you at PPC for more than a year?*

AARNES: Fourteen months.

*Q: This was a time of great mobility. There probably was a hiring freeze so it put a premium on stealing from other offices.*

AARNES: Yes. So, in the fall of 1979 I moved back to the technical bureau. At that time it was called DSB, the Development Support Bureau. I became a special assistant to Dr. Steve Joseph, who was one of the three DAAs (Deputy Assistant Administrator) in the bureau. He was in charge of four offices in DSB: Health, Population, Education, and Participant Training. He had been a career employee for AID for a brief period of time some years before and had been brought back to the agency for this job. As his special

assistant I saw how every part of the bureau worked. The head of the bureau was Sander Levin, who's now been in Congress as a representative from Michigan for

*Q: Ever.*

AARNES: Yes, almost thirty-five years. He was elected in 1982. But in 1979, he was in AID as the Assistant Administrator for DSB. He and Steve Joseph had removed Rei Ravenholt from being the director of the Office of Population and had assigned him to be chief of the office's training division. They were working to find a place for him outside AID. In early 1980, Rei left the agency and went to CDC (Centers for Disease Control), where he worked until he retired in 1987.

*Q: So, do you know- was it purely power politics? What caused Sander Levin and Steve Joseph to want to remove Dr. Ravenholt?*

AARNES: I wasn't there when Ravenholt's ouster from the director position actually happened, and Steve and Sandy never talked about it with me. Power politics may well have been part of it. I understand that the immediate cause was said to be a speech on sterilization that he had delivered in St. Louis. More generally, some liberals didn't support him because he was so focused on lowering population growth rates, and not interested in integrating family planning with health. On the conservative side, opponents of family planning certainly wanted him out. And over the years, Ravenholt had infuriated many of AID's senior managers, as well as mission directors and ambassadors. He didn't have strong supporters in the system.

*Q: Do you remember any other big issues during the time that you were working with Steve Joseph?*

AARNES: One big issue was IDCA's proposal that AID discontinue all activities in the Education sector. IDCA (U.S. International Development Cooperation Agency) had just been established. It had been created with the intention that it would be in charge of coordinating all U.S. foreign assistance, but in the end, all but two agencies – AID and OPIC – had managed to escape being absorbed into it. IDCA was looking for ways to focus AID's engagement in fewer sectors, ones that they felt were most essential to development. PPC and DSB joined together to push back strongly against IDCA's proposal to phase out assistance to the education sector. The proposal didn't go anywhere, and by the end of the Carter Administration, about 15 months later, IDCA itself had withered away.

In the population sector, there were many issues about program operations. For example, some of the issues involved ensuring that voluntary sterilization programs provided safe, high-quality services; and that contraceptive supply programs were careful, efficient, and provided supplies based on reasonable projections of need. Steve Joseph kept a close

watch on the Office of Population in order to get control of the staff and operations after Ravenholt was gone.



In the Participant Training program, many of the issues were operational. The Training office struggled to find a way to get an accurate count of the number of participant trainees studying in the U.S. at any given time. That problem didn't get solved in the 17 months I worked as special assistant.

*Q: Interesting.*

AARNES: Steve Joseph resigned from AID in early 1981 over the infant formula marketing controversy. He actually was not a political appointee; he had been brought back into the agency through another mechanism. He would have liked to stay in AID, but he was having difficulty getting the agency to agree to that, at this early point in the Reagan administration. The struggle over the U.S. position on the WHO (World Health Organization) proposal for an infant formula marketing code was coming to a head. The U.S., Bangladesh and Chad were the only countries to vote against the infant formula marketing code. Steve Joseph resigned from AID along with Tony Babb, the bureau's DAA for Agriculture, in protest against the U.S. position.

*Q: But you were no longer working with him at that point, I think.*

AARNES: Right. It was clear that my special assistant job was going to disappear as the new administration settled in, and I was eager to get back into the population field. So, early in 1981, I shifted back to the Office of Population as the chief of the Information, Education and Communications (IE&C) division. The office was working to increase its expertise in communications to support family planning programs around the world. New approaches had been developed and tested for communications on family planning. The AID missions were asking for stronger and broader support for field programs. So, we developed a comprehensive family planning communications program, and Johns Hopkins University won the competition for it, with a consortium of firms. The project started off as a cooperative agreement, turned into a grant, and it was the foundation of AID's central population communications program for more than 20 years.

*Q: The Office of Population funded several projects with Johns Hopkins, as I recall.*

AARNES: Yes. Johns Hopkins had several grants from USAID. One that was particularly well known was JHPIEGO, which stands for Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics. It was a training program principally for doctors, and my division managed that project as well.

After I had been the IE&C division chief for about a year, training programs were shifted into our division. The combined division was Information and Training.

*Q: Anchor for me, what were the years?*

AARNES: I was a division chief from 1981 until 1988, more than seven years. We developed a management training program for leaders of family planning programs in the field, which lasted for more than 10 years, and we also supported technical training for both medical and paramedical personnel. We funded a program to provide information

for family planning and health professionals, the Population Reports, which were very popular around the world, and were published in English, French and Spanish. They dealt in depth with key issues in family planning programs, and they were used especially by medical, paramedical, and other program workers.

*Q: Right. Who were the leaders of the population program at that time?*

AARNES: Dr. Joe Speidel, who had been the deputy in the Office of Population under Rei Ravenholt, was the acting director until 1983, when Steve Sinding was brought in from the Philippines to be the director of the office. Steve was there until 1986, when Duff Gillespie took over as director.

Personally, too, it was an extremely busy time for me. I had married David Sprague, an AID colleague, and we had two little children. So with that and building up the division and the programs and traveling, I was very busy.

*Q: Right. Do you remember anything about that time, with young children and a job that requires travel and a management job that requires you to deal with personnel and budgets as well as programs, do you have any memories at all or is it just a numb blur? And did you have any role models that would be helpful?*

AARNES: I did not have a mentor or role model at that point. By chance, the people I had known had retired or moved away during those years. It was a difficult time. It was still rare for women to work, especially in management jobs, and have children. I had several very good friends in AID who were also juggling management jobs and small children. It was enormously reassuring to talk with them every now and then, but of course we didn't have time to do that very often. It was not an easy environment. I had to prove constantly that I was just as reliable and available and flexible as someone who didn't have small children on their mind. It was very stressful to try to leave the office on time every day to pick up the children before the day care facility shut down. And on days when one of the children was sick, it was especially difficult. Several times, a woman – sometimes a friend, sometimes a person I didn't know well – would come to my office to see me; she and her husband would be thinking about having children and she would want to know how I managed everything. I always tried to be very encouraging, but honest.

*Q: Yes, I imagine.*

AARNES: But during those years, our staff put the Office of Population's communications programs on a good footing at last. Some of the things that were created through the principal communications project were exciting. In 1986, the project developed a music video that became a major hit in Latin America. This came about because the project organized a song-writing competition among some major songwriters in the region, and then oversaw production.

*Q: Oh, I remember this.*

AARNES: The singers were Tatiana and Johnny. Tatiana was about 18 and Johnny was about 20, and they were both already popular stars in Latin America. The song was called “Cuando Estemos Juntos”, “When We’re Together.” This song was the number two song in Latin America for many weeks. It was about postponing sex until later, which was a particularly acceptable message during the Reagan Administration. When Tatiana and Johnny came to the U.S. and went to meetings on the Hill, there was a big presentation and a luncheon for them. Their visit got tremendous coverage in the news. AID’s deputy administrator, Jay Morris, was on the TV evening news talking proudly about it, saying, “You see, it’s about what we’re all in favor of; it’s about abstinence.”

*Q: So, the message was it’s cool to wait?*

AARNES: Yes. Basically, “when we’re together we’re so in love but we know that we’ll wait”. It had a catchy melody and beat.

*Q: What were some of the other priorities you worked on?*

The Office of Population put a new focus on programs in Africa in the late 1980s. In 1987, Nigeria, with its large population size and rapid population growth rate, was a high priority for assistance to get family planning programs going. Keys McManus was the AID Representative in Nigeria, leading a small staff that focused on population. The Office of Population was in charge of funding and coordinating all aspects of the program, and I was in charge of that coordination. We worked with AID staff in Nigeria, staff of the regional AID mission in Abidjan, and counterparts from the Government of Nigeria and the Nigerian private sector to design and contract a major AID-funded program to help increase availability and use of contraception, as well as the Nigerian government’s leadership and management.

I also spent a month in Rwanda to help develop the PID (Project Identification Document) for a new family planning project. In those years, families in Rwanda had an average of 8.6 children each. When I went out in the country, it seemed as though you could walk through the fields and see all 8.6 children in front of every house.

One of the major issues for AID’s population programs in those years was voluntary sterilization and informed choice. The Office of Population worked on developing protocols for ensuring informed choice and acceptance of family planning.

*Q: Right. Was your division involved with that?*

AARNES: My division focused on communications to potential acceptors of voluntary sterilization or other methods of contraception. We were also involved from time to time in drafting replies to the many Congressional or public inquiries about informed choice.

Working in the Office of Population, we were next to, and part of, an excellent base of expertise that made it possible, and expected, that we would develop very high-quality programs in our technical areas. It was a pleasure to be surrounded by technical experts and to remain current about the latest research and the latest approaches.

*Q: I get that.*

AARNES: Another ongoing issue in population programs in the 1980s was natural family planning, and particularly the Billings method.

*Q: Because this was during the Reagan years.*

AARNES: Right. In 1981, the new Reagan administration attempted to zero out AID's entire population budget. The population program had enough powerful friends that they could be rounded up quickly to squash that attempt. But there was a lot of movement against family planning, and especially strong opposition to anything that appeared to have any kind of connection with abortion. The opposition to abortion was extended into the provision of any family planning services. The Office of Population was persuaded to fund a project on the Billings method of family planning, and my division was assigned to house that project because it was essentially a training program.

*Q: Right, right. And, I guess up to Mexico City, was AID counseling on abortion?*

AARNES: No.

*Q: Okay. So, Mexico City actually took the prohibitions even further.*

AARNES: It took the prohibitions further in particular by prohibiting any U.S. government assistance to any foreign NGOs that provide abortion services, counseling, or referrals, or that advocate to make abortion legal or to expand abortion services. This prohibition covers any of these activities that the NGO might engage in, with funding from any source. AID hasn't funded any abortion-related activities since the Helms Amendment in 1973. But AID is allowed to fund care for women who have had abortions, and also for women who have had miscarriages.

*Q: Okay. So, we covered almost 20 years of AID, early years. Any thoughts on continuity or things that USAID just isn't anymore, sort of broad reflections?*

AARNES: Certainly in those years AID was a lot more agile operationally. When there was an emergency, the agency could move very fast. While there were always a lot of bureaucratic requirements and clearances, those steps could be done quickly.

*Q: Right. Why do you think that's changed?*

AARNES: Well, many people have studied this problem. I think it arose out of caution, basically, the fear of making mistakes that would get the agency into trouble on the Hill and with the administration. This is a very valid concern, but I think that, to tackle it, first of all, it's essential for AID's top leadership, and the leadership of every bureau and office, to make sure that the agency's focus stays on what our goal is and what we are trying to accomplish, rather than playing it safe by piling on endless procedures to safeguard every step. They need to emphasize that every part of the agency has its own essential function, but the goal for everyone is to assist in accomplishing what the agency was created to accomplish, which is to help countries and their people with economic

development. I think we lose sight of that. Programs get buried under bureaucratic processes.

The problem shows up in a lot of things we do. For example, it makes the task of hiring new staff for the agency extraordinarily rigid and time-consuming. But it is particularly noticeable in the contracting process. It's astounding how long it takes to get a program going, and it's mainly the contracting process that's so lengthy. It isn't necessarily that people are dragging their feet; it's just the requirement of many, many steps, as well as the expectation that the process will be extremely lengthy and that it takes precedence over everything else, including the urgency and importance of the activities that are to be funded. The amount of time that AID officers spend on paperwork, including justifying, documenting, and reporting on each step of an activity, has an incredible impact on the time that we used to be able to spend on programs.

*Q: Do you think this – the growth of paperwork – happened because of pressures from the outside, or was it mostly self-imposed?*

AARNES: I think outside pressures were the main cause, but AID went too far in trying to be responsive. AID is a small agency, with no natural constituency in the American public, so it's not a strong player on the Washington scene. That makes it especially vulnerable to criticism and takeover attempts. I think the focus on checking documents and being so cautious is because we've been burned and we're afraid that any missteps might endanger the agency. AID became hyper-concerned with protecting itself from negative publicity or audit problems.

Another change that led to more paperwork and slowed down programs is the State Department's growing influence over AID's programs. So, especially with the establishment of the F Bureau in State, the amount of time spent just on paperwork skyrocketed without serious thought about whether the new demands from F for the budget and funding process accomplish enough to justify the time they require. Technical officers, both in the field and in Washington, spend enormous amounts of time on accounting exercises. That significantly lessens how much effort can be devoted to achieving the agency's development goals. In addition, the State Department has an important influence over what we focus on, how we design our programs, and what we are able to do.

*Q: So, you see the increasing role of State in foreign assistance programming as driving some of this need to focus on justifying and counting as opposed to doing?*

AARNES: In part, yes. I certainly think it's true in the budget function. That comes from the F Bureau, which is not an AID creation. Also, State has a great deal of influence over what we do and the balance of programs and how fast we can move.

*Q: Right. Well, that's really interesting. So, that takes us to 1988. Let's talk now about the Women's Action Organization.*

AARNES: I was the AID vice-president for the Women's Action Organization from 1973

until 1977 and then I followed it closely for a few years after that. The Women's Action Organization, WAO, was started in late 1970. It grew out of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Status on Women, which was a committee that had been formed by a group of women in the State Department. The purpose of the committee was to inform and advise management on how to improve the status of women in the foreign affairs agencies and their opportunities for advancement. The women had decided to form this committee because the State Department had just issued an extensive report on diplomacy for the 1970s, and that report had been developed by an all-male group. The report didn't mention anything at all about the status of women. In late 1970, the members of this ad hoc committee turned the committee into the Women's Action Organization, WAO. The first president of WAO was Mary Olmsted. She later became the first U.S. ambassador to Papua New Guinea.

WAO was formed as a voluntary organization with the goal of working for equal status and opportunities for women in the foreign affairs agencies, which were State, AID and USIA (United States Information Agency) at the time. Membership was open to both female and male employees and Foreign Service spouses from all three agencies. In those early years, that first group of women accomplished a tremendous amount. They had a major input into the policies that established new ground rules for women working in the foreign affairs agencies. One of the new policies prohibited discrimination against women in hiring, promotion, training and assignments. Another policy allowed women to marry and remain in the Foreign Service and also to take dependents overseas. Before that policy was enacted in 1971, women had had to resign from the Foreign Service if they married. Even if they were unmarried, they couldn't take their dependents overseas. After the new policy came into effect, I believe the first woman who took a dependent overseas took her mother with her.

Another of the new policies declared that spouses of Foreign Service officers are individuals and are not to be called on for service. Before this policy came into effect, spouses were frequently called on to help in post events and other activities, and their behavior and performance were rated as part of their husband's performance evaluations. They were supposed to be available as sort of free labor for higher-ups to call on, and how they responded affected their husband's career. The new policy declared that any participation by spouses in an activity must be voluntary. The policy also allowed spouses to work at post; they hadn't been allowed to work before.

Finally, there was a policy on the professional status and standards for Foreign Service secretaries. There were many Foreign Service secretaries in both State and AID at that time. They were generally very capable, good managers, and well educated, but were often not treated with respect, as professionals, and there were no opportunities for advancement out of the secretarial cone. So the new policy stated that Foreign Service secretaries are full professionals. They must be treated as professionals, and they must meet the standards set out in the policy.

*Q: What was WAO's relationship with management at this point? Did WAO serve as a*

*kind of management arm?*

AARNES: No, WAO was an independent organization. It was not part of management, or of other employees' associations or unions. It was set up for the purpose of, first, serving as a kind of watchdog, ensuring the enforcement of the new policies and the few existing programs to enhance the status of women and professional opportunities for women. Second, WAO worked with management and with other groups to help identify and resolve problems, to suggest new approaches, and to encourage new efforts, new programs, and new policies to bring about the needed changes. WAO took a positive, constructive, persistent approach. It wasn't confrontational. A third purpose of WAO was to keep women informed of the policies, programs and issues and of ways that they could work within the system to improve their status and find opportunities to advance.

*Q: Do you have any idea how many women or how many individuals in AID were members of WAO?*

AARNES: As I recall, there were around 300 WAO members from AID, and close to 1,000 members total, including members from State and USIA. That was quite good, considering how few women were in these agencies. Many other women who were not WAO members attended WAO programs and used our materials.

Because WAO was an independent voluntary organization, its leaders were able to work with management at any level and with other officials at any level. In AID, as in the other agencies, WAO carried out an information program. The AID board of WAO organized discussions for employees during lunch hours, brought in speakers, and created and distributed printed materials. WAO had a particular focus in AID on certain issues during the years I was there, for example, on understanding and informing women about the performance evaluation process, on upward mobility for secretaries, and on creating opportunities for dependent spouses. WAO had a critical role in advocating for, developing, and starting up an upward mobility program for AID Foreign Service Secretaries. The program established a bridge to regular Foreign Service Officer status.

The qualifications to join the program were steep and it was highly competitive. But the participants who were accepted into the program generally succeeded.

*Q: They became Foreign Service officers?*

AARNES: Yes, program officers, technical officers, admin officers, many backstops, and they went on to successful careers as AID Foreign Service officers. The WAO board members from State also had a lot to do with the formation of the Family Liaison Office in State, the FLO, and the CLOs (Community Liaison Officer) at overseas posts.

It is astonishing to remember how few women there were in AID in the early 1970s, particularly at the higher levels. In 1971, an article in Front Lines said there had never been any female AID mission directors or deputy directors, and there were currently no female assistant administrators. In the past, I believe there had been two female assistant administrators, both of whom were political appointees, and there had been a couple of

female deputy assistant administrators, but there weren't any in 1971. There were 11 female GS-16s and above. There was one woman who was an FSR-1, which was equivalent to the top of the Senior Foreign Service at that point, and there were 10 who were at the next level.

*Q: And this was a time when the agency had thousands more employees than it has today.*

AARNES: Thousands more. The percentage of women in those categories varied from zero to 1.5 percent. In 1976, five years after the Front Lines article, those figures for the Foreign Service had changed from one woman at the top level to two, and from 10 at the second level down to five. So, those numbers had gone slightly down, and from the next level, which was approximately equivalent to a GS-16, from 11 women down to seven.

*Q: So, there was a RIF in there, wasn't there?*

AARNES: There was a big RIF earlier, in 1968. There were a lot of threats of a RIF later, but it had been so damaging in 1968 that the agency tried hard to avoid doing another one.

But women were almost completely absent from the upper levels in AID. At the end of 1976, beginning of 1977, women weren't in the top leadership, and women also weren't in the middle ranks, especially not in the upper middle. I had an office director who was female, Priscilla Boughton, when I was an assistant desk officer for Bangladesh, and she was the only female office director in the bureau. My boss was the desk officer; she was

the only female desk officer in the bureau and I was the only female assistant desk officer. In the Civil Service in AID there was a larger percentage of women than in the Foreign Service. About 38 percent of AID's GS employees were women, but they were heavily concentrated at the lower levels. Around seven percent of the higher-grade GS employees were women, whereas more than two thirds of the employees at grades GS-12 and below were women. They were clustered heavily in the secretarial/administrative ranks. In the Foreign Service at that point, only five percent of AID Foreign Service officers were female. In that whole decade of the '70s, there were a number of efforts to remove the restrictions that had artificially kept women back. But the process of change in the Foreign Service was very long and very slow. The proportion of female Foreign Service officers during that time went from five percent down to four and a half percent. Then it went back up to five percent and rose very gradually after that. By the time I retired from AID, in 2015, it was 48 percent. So, perhaps, if the agency keeps focusing on this issue—

*Q: They're going to get to 50.*

AARNES: They are going to get to 50 and they might even get to 51 or whatever it is to reflect the percentage of women in the population of the U.S. Improving the status and opportunities for women has been a long and difficult slog.



*Q: Now, did you ever find yourself in conflict with the agency leadership because of your role at WAO?*

AARNES: Not very often. When I started working on women's issues in AID, I was a GS-9 or 11. I was one of not very many women and there weren't very many young people in the agency at all at that point. They were just starting to come back after a lot of younger staff had been RIFed in 1968. I think AID management didn't always welcome our urging attention to women's issues and pointing out problems. They were sometimes a bit sharp or unfriendly, but they usually dealt with us in a professional way. Personally, I wasn't really threatening to them, perhaps because I was such a low grade. When I first joined the Office of Population, the next youngest person in my division was 32 years older than I was, so I didn't represent a big threat.

*Q: But the organization might have seen you as a threat.*

AARNES: At the top levels, the leadership was positive in a very general sense and didn't appear to be threatened. In 1974, the WAO Governing Board members for AID, all six of us, met with the AID Administrator at the time, Daniel Parker. He came from a business and political background, and he didn't have experience in development or much experience in the government bureaucracy. We had sent him briefing papers in advance on all the policies and issues. In the meeting, the Administrator was positive and interested. We told him that it would be very helpful if he would make a statement on the importance of following the policies on the status and opportunities for women and making sure that there was equality of opportunity and no discrimination. And he said, very nicely, "I really think everyone in the agency knows my position on that." Of course, he had never said anything at all on the subject and perhaps he just didn't know how to communicate his positions to the agency. So we assured him that a statement from him would be very useful.

*Q: Even if it was a repetition.*

AARNES: It would be very useful coming from the Administrator.

*Q: Did you get it?*

AARNES: Yes, eventually. The State WAO Governing Board had met with Secretary Kissinger earlier in 1974 and he actually came out with a few statements over the course of the next couple of years. So, at the top level, I think much of the leadership of State and AID knew, at least in a general way, what the policies were and what was supposed to be happening. They were supportive overall, but those issues were far from being their priorities.

*Q: Good as far as it goes, but—*

AARNES: Yes, but WAO's dealings with management at a lower level could be a lot trickier. We were talking to them about actual concrete changes. The fact that we had had a positive meeting with the Administrator gave us a bit more leverage in dealing with

AID management down the line. And overall, when we went in to talk to management, we were very careful to be factual and firm, but collaborative. WAO did not position itself as an opponent of management. We were willing to work with them but we did not gloss over issues. I remember one specific case – this wasn't the only one, but it was notable – when I met with a woman in HR (Human Resources) who was in a position of considerable responsibility. She happened to have been a Foreign Service secretary herself and then had been offered an extremely unusual opportunity to move from the secretarial personnel system to the Foreign Service Officer system. She had done well and had advanced to the equivalent of about a GS-14, which was quite a bit higher than most women in the agency. I and a couple of the other members of the AID WAO Board had come to meet with her to talk about starting the upward mobility program for Foreign Service secretaries in AID. The HR officer told us that she had very strong reservations about establishing an upward mobility program for Foreign Service secretaries. She was reluctant to start the program at all, she said, because she was afraid that some Foreign Service secretaries were going to feel pressured into applying.

*Q: Hmm.*

AARNES: We said, “How did you feel about moving from being a Foreign Service secretary to being a Foreign Service officer?” She said, “Well, I had to think about it very hard.” It was somewhat discouraging.

*Q: It is. And I'm wondering if that was a case of I've arrived, pull up the gangplank.*

AARNES: There might have been some of that. In any event, WAO didn't stop working on it and the program did start. WAO was involved throughout. It was on the task force to develop the program and had a major role in getting the program underway. There were a lot of applications, and the women who went through the program did very well. But I've always remembered that curious conversation with the HR officer, and her reluctance to offer other Foreign Service secretaries the chance to decide for themselves whether to try to move out of the secretarial field.

*Q: The assumption that all women would necessarily support what you were doing is flat out wrong. There are just too many examples where women are not necessarily always the best advocates for women.*

AARNES: No, they're not, and we saw a number of examples of that. Sometimes, also, women reacted negatively to what WAO was doing. I remember once being particularly discouraged when a young GS secretary in the office where I was working burst out angrily when I mentioned what WAO was trying to do to improve opportunities for women. She said, none of this is going to do any good, there's nothing you can do, this doesn't make any sense at all and I don't know why you're doing this anyway. She refused to have anything to do with WAO. She may have been reacting out of frustration and a sense of helplessness, but it was crushing. Interestingly, when a GS upward mobility program began, a year or so after that, she applied for it, got in, finished the program, left the secretarial force and became a very successful contracting officer. So,

there you are. But change is difficult. It can make people anxious and frustrated.

*Q: Right. And making change was a long slog.*

AARNES: Yes, it was. Everything WAO did and said was very carefully based on the agency's policies and statistics. It required a great deal of work. I have old files of data on what the promotion rates were. They show that, generally, women were promoted much more slowly than men from one grade to the next. On average, they spent many more years in grade than men did before moving to the next level. So, as the women moved up, they tended to be significantly older on average than the men in the same grade. At one point, in 1977, AID announced that the retirement age in the Foreign Service was going to be changed from 65 to 60. (It was moved back very soon to 65, although not before quite a few officers over age 60 had retired.) Setting the retirement age at 60 would have been a further disadvantage for women, because the women that were at the highest grades would have even less chance to take leadership positions.

*Q: Because it took so long to get there.*

AARNES: Right. The higher-grade women, all of them, were over 50. There weren't very many of them and it had taken them forever to reach those grades. So they had fewer years left to serve in senior positions before they reached the mandatory retirement age.

*Q: How did you find the overall atmosphere toward you, and toward women's issues, in the places where you worked during the 1970s? Did you find any resentment or other difficulty?*

AARNES: The Office of Population was difficult for women in some ways, but I didn't feel any particular hostility toward women. Perhaps the fact that the office was a relatively new part of AID, in a sector that AID hadn't worked in before, made it a little more open. As I mentioned, there was a higher proportion of women in the Office of Population who were in non-secretarial jobs than there were in, for example, regional bureaus. Although it was very unusual for a woman to hold a management position in the Office of Population, I don't remember it as a hostile environment for working. I think the environment could be more difficult for women in some of the regional bureaus where it had been extremely rare for women to work. When I went to the Asia Bureau, I felt a certain wariness and a definite coolness. Many of the bureau employees were Foreign Service officers who had spent relatively little time in Washington. I did not sense that coolness among the top leadership of the bureau.

*Q: It was mid-level managers who worked their way up and didn't want things to change?*

AARNES: Yes, I felt resistance from some mid-level managers who had worked their way up. There were occasional hostile and dismissive comments. The message seemed to be, "What is this woman doing sitting at this desk? Does she think this is her place? And she's part of that women's lib group." I hadn't encountered that before.

It appeared that the Asia Bureau's management and staff were not very familiar with agency policies regarding women's professional status and opportunities, or with the issues concerning women who were coming up in the foreign affairs agencies. I was in a bureau meeting once when a discussion began about the bureau's trouble keeping several very strong Foreign Service officers in the field. The officers were curtailing their tours and coming back to Washington. One of the principal issues, as I noted, was that the spouses of these officers had been working in the mission for \$2 an hour or less, on the local wage scale because there were no other jobs open to them at post. When posts did not offer reasonable professional opportunities to highly qualified spouses, the agency was having trouble retaining officers. The Asia Bureau officers did not know about these issues or about policies and programs that pertained to them.

Jack Sullivan, who was the Assistant Administrator for Asia, was generally supportive on issues concerning women's status and opportunities in AID. This seemed to be the case with AID leadership across the board. However, it was becoming clear that general support from leadership was not enough to advance women's status and opportunities significantly or to resolve issues that AID and other agencies were facing that were related to women's professional status and opportunities.

*Q: It was basically just lip service.*

AARNES: Yes. These problems illustrated the need for a watchdog and information function, which WAO also provided. WAO worked closely with the EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) office in AID, but that office was within the organization so they had to speak and act within the Administrator's guidelines. By contrast, WAO, as an independent organization, could go anywhere we wanted to and talk about what was happening, what the statistics were and what the real barriers were.

*Q: You were helped that the agency already had policies on the books.*

AARNES: It was a tremendous help. We could talk about the issues facing women in relation to the agency's clear commitment to change. The key policies that were put in place in the early 1970s provided the foundation for improving the status and opportunities for women. There actually had been a policy in 1967, although it hadn't been followed. In 1972, because of the leadership of Mary Olmsted and her colleagues, WAO received the Presidential Management Improvement Award for their achievements.

*Q: That's great.*

AARNES: Yes, it was. Imagine what those women had to do to buck the system and to put those policies together, and the skill and persistence it took to negotiate them through the system.

*Q: Who do you think, if you even think in these terms, are the heroes of the WAO? I mean, obviously Mary Olmsted, but were there certain figures who really stood out as being either very foresighted or very persuasive?*

AARNES: For two years in the mid-1970s, the president for all of WAO was Annette Buckland from AID. She was extremely effective. She had tremendous energy and drive and persuasive ability. And she took herself seriously, which is something that women often did not do at that time. She understood the issues thoroughly, she articulated them very well, and she got the management of the foreign affairs agencies to take them seriously. She was also tireless in keeping up WAO's communication with Civil Service and Foreign Service women. She made sure to keep a flow of information coming to them about policies that prohibited gender-based discrimination, opportunities for advancement, and practical advice on managing workplace issues.

*Q: Right. Did WAO take a lot of your time in those years?*

AARNES: Yes, it did take time. I worked on WAO issues most nights, poring over the statistics or preparing for one of our public programs. I knew every woman in the agency by name, even if we hadn't met.

*Q: All the names and all of their backgrounds, yes. And I imagine it gave you an opportunity to meet colleagues from State and from USIA that you might not otherwise have.*

AARNES: Absolutely. It gave me a better view of foreign affairs agencies and what they did, what they were concerned with, and how they operated.

Mary Olmsted said, after she had stopped working with WAO, how important her experience in WAO had been for her professionally. I myself benefited a great deal from being involved with WAO. As a woman, and a low grade coming up, I did not have other opportunities to try to negotiate anything with anyone, to learn how to present information and suggestions to higher levels in management, much less to the administrator, and to analyze and argue issues, to prepare briefing papers. I didn't have that kind of opportunity in my jobs. I learned those things through WAO.

*Q: That's interesting.*

AARNES: Mary Olmsted, in her oral history, said much the same thing. Also, she said that her work on the Ad Hoc Committee and with WAO enabled her to become known to people who would otherwise never have known who she was. I'm sure that many of the AID women who were active in WAO benefited that way too.

*Q: Right. Fascinating. Does WAO still exist?*

AARNES: No, it was dissolved in the late 1990s. The women on WAO's AID Governing Board decided that it was no longer needed in the agency, and I understand that the State Department Governing Board members decided the same thing. I think many of the basic issues have been dealt with successfully, so there's not the same pressing need for an organization like WAO. But I think that women should keep watching these issues.

*Q: Yes, absolutely.*

AARNES: In the past decade in AID/Washington, two of the female agency counselors, Bambi Arellano and Susan Reichle, organized meetings periodically for AID women to meet each other, hear about the experiences of some senior women, and talk over issues.

One process that should be watched carefully is the Foreign Service promotion boards. I served on the AID promotion boards four times and one time, when I was on the Senior Foreign Service board, I witnessed why it's necessary to have a woman on the board. That was one of the issues that WAO had been emphasizing 40 years earlier: the need to include women on the promotion boards. The board that I was serving on had on it a person who simply talked through me as though I were not there, and he also appeared to brush past the board's consideration of female candidates the same way. It was behavior that I hadn't seen for 20 years, but then I hadn't been in that kind of situation before, where women and men were being evaluated together. It was a reminder that it's still essential to have women in the room as part of each board. They won't exist unless they are present and participating.

*Q: Right. Well, same thing with minorities.*

AARNES: Yes, absolutely. There was an African-American very senior AID officer on the promotion board with me and he gave me some valuable insights.

*Q: Well, I remember when Carol Lancaster was the deputy administrator and she had to approve all of the appointments for senior positions. She made a very unpopular, for the career people, decision that she was not going to look at a panel of candidates for the senior positions unless at least one of the candidates was female or minority. And there was, of course, a lot of chest beating and we can't do this and this is wrong- but she stuck to her guns and it probably opened up opportunities for women and minorities to reach the senior-most positions a decade faster than it otherwise would have.*

AARNES: Yes, it probably did. I remember a situation like the one you just described, when I was posted in Ukraine in the mid-1990s. As the mission's program officer, I often had to sign off on sending Ukrainian participants to training courses in the US. There was one technical office that always sent me lists of men – no women – for each training course. The director and deputy director of this office refused to include any women because they said it wouldn't be appropriate, the women wouldn't fit in, it would be hard to find women with the right qualifications, the government ministry wouldn't like it, and on and on. Then I found out that, whenever our deputy mission director had to approve a training request, he would only agree to sign off if half the trainees were women. I asked him, "Then what happens, after you say you won't sign off on their list?" He said, "I get a list that's half women. Half the people that go to the course are women; that's the way it is."

*Q: So, there are these islands of leadership or forward thinking.*

AARNES: The WAO experience underscored the point that, to make real progress,

leaders need to communicate to their organization that this issue is a priority for them, and they need to set measurable goals, and step in personally when necessary, to see that the changes are made.

*Q: Well, thank you. I think that's really valuable to have.*

*Q: This is the third session with Anne Aarnes. I think we are going to move overseas.*

AARNES: My husband, David Sprague, and I had both been GS employees since we joined AID and we both had been interested in going overseas for many years, since long before we met. Every now and then a mission would ask if we would consider transferring to the Foreign Service. But for one reason or another, it had never quite worked out. Either it was a time when one of us was not able to make it, couldn't get away from our jobs or was embarking on an exciting new program, or there would be an agency hiring freeze. Finally, in 1987, we decided to look into the possibility of converting to the Foreign Service. By that time, David had been the director of the Office of Education in the central technical bureau for almost eight years, and I was a division chief in the Office of Population.

So, we went to HR in AID and met with Bob Halligan, who was the head of HR. He invited the head of AID's Civil Service personnel to join the conversation. They both supported our interest in converting. Bob Halligan sent us to talk to Jim Norris, who was due to go to Pakistan as the mission director within the next year. The agency hadn't been able to find anyone who could head up the mission's education program. There was a large new Congressional earmark for basic education, and the agency planned to meet the earmark principally by starting a major education program in Pakistan. The agency also hadn't been able to fill the population officer job in the Pakistan mission.

*Q: Sounds ideal.*

AARNES: Yes, it was a very good fit. And again, everybody was in agreement. AFSA approved it because the agency had tried hard to fill the jobs with current Foreign Service officers and hadn't been able to. It took about a year to go through the paperwork processing. One complication was that AID's criteria for qualifying for Foreign Service jobs in the population and health fields had been changed a few years earlier, apparently without extensive review, to require an advanced degree in public health or as a medical doctor or a nurse or a demographer. Years of experience in the field did not count.

*Q: And not in social science?*

AARNES: Not social science generally. The academic degree requirements for population and health officers were very specific. So, I was brought into the Foreign Service as a program officer and then sent to Pakistan as the population officer. About a year later, when the Office of Population director heard the story, he realized that neither he nor the previous director nor some of the most prominent leaders in the population field would meet AID's new academic requirements for population and health officers. Within a year, the entry requirements were changed to broaden the academic fields that

could meet the degree requirements, and to recognize extensive experience in the technical field.

My husband and I converted to the Foreign Service, and early in August 1988 we arrived in Pakistan with our children, ages three and five. My husband was assigned as the head of the mission's Office of Human Resources Development, HRD, which was in charge of education and training programs. I was assigned as the deputy head of HPN, the Health, Population and Nutrition office. We were thrilled to be there, but I noticed that an awareness of women as professionals, independent of their husbands, had not fully arrived at the post.

*Q: Notwithstanding our earlier conversation.*

AARNES: The tandem couples concept hadn't fully entered everyone's consciousness yet. That was clear when the post's next weekly newsletter came out. The newsletter always announced the arrival of new staff at post. It would say, so-and-so has arrived as the new such and such officer, accompanied by whatever dependent family members. In our case, the post's newsletter said: Dr. David Sprague has arrived at post as the head of USAID's Office of Human Resources Development. He is accompanied by his wife, Anne Aarnes – who, the newsletter did say, will be the deputy head of the Health, Population and Nutrition Office – and their children. I didn't say anything about that because I was new and trying to fit in, but soon another woman who worked in the HPN office, a first-tour health officer who was also a member of a tandem couple, mentioned it to me in dismay. In my first year at post, the mission's motor pool also often dragged their feet when I needed transportation to meetings. That kind of thing happened a lot to women in the mission.

*Q: Right. At that time how many professional women were working in the mission?*

AARNES: In 1988 the AID mission included only about five female Foreign Service officers and one Foreign Service secretary. I was the highest-ranking woman in the mission at that time. I think there had previously been other female deputy office heads and a few office heads in the Pakistan mission, but it was rare. In the next few years, under the leadership of Jim Norris as mission director, more female Foreign Service officers came to serve in Pakistan, including as office heads and as the deputy mission director.

I worked in Pakistan for five years. After the first nine months, I became the head of the HPN office when the previous director finished his tour and transferred to another post.

*Q: Say a little bit about what it was like then. I know you've commented that you could travel anywhere and it was not the kind of security situation that we now associate with Pakistan.*

AARNES: In 1988, Pakistan was AID's second largest program, with project activities all over the country. There were AID staff houses in the provincial capitals where mission staff could spend the night and get logistical support. We traveled frequently to



all four provinces. There were some restrictions – for example, Balochistan often had security problems so we were required to have a Pakistani soldier with us as a guard whenever we traveled outside Quetta. The guards carried old, rusty guns, and sometimes the guns would go off by accident. The tribal areas have always been rough and dangerous, and special clearances were required to go there.

*Q: But you could get them?*

AARNES: You could get them and you could go to most places.

*Q: And you did?*

AARNES: And we did. AID had projects almost everywhere.

*Q: At that point was the program still ramping up or, by the time you got there, was it starting to close down?*

AARNES: It was still ramping up. So, my job was exciting and challenging. At the time I came to Pakistan, funds to expand HPN programs were readily available and there was strong support from Mission leadership. For a number of years, the AID program in Pakistan had been emphasizing programs in agriculture and energy, and a lot of the attention and funding had gone to those sectors. But now attention increased to the social sectors: education, population and health. New data had come out about a year before which showed that, while Pakistan had been making progress in a number of sectors, its performance in the social sectors was abysmal. The data indicated that the very poor status of the education and health sectors, and the high population growth rate, were going to have a strong negative impact on Pakistan in the future and on its prospects for becoming a developed, prosperous country.

*Q: Could you give some of the statistics for the social sectors?*

AARNES: Sure. In the 1980s, the infant mortality rate in Pakistan had been around 100 and contraceptive prevalence was a little less than seven percent. The population growth rate was over three percent. At that rate, Pakistan's population would double in around 23 years. And in the education sector there were similar alarming statistics. For example, regarding female literacy, 26 percent of women were counted as literate, and "literacy" often meant that they might be able to write their names, but perhaps nothing more.

*Q: You said that when you visited Pakistan in the 1970s, there were a lot of problems with the Pakistan government's population program. So when you came back in 1988 and were in charge of AID's assistance to that program, what was it like?*

AARNES: Well, by 1988, the Government of Pakistan had had a strong policy for more than 20 years to lower the population growth rate and provide voluntary family planning services. But despite a series of ambitious statements and strategies, and quite a lot of funding from donors, the program had failed to make significant progress. The quality of services was poor and the management was weak also. Many people in Pakistan, including in the government, and in the international development community too,

thought that family planning programs would not succeed in Pakistan's conservative culture until the country reached a much higher level of development and the government's capacity improved.

*Q: Sounds pretty grim. Were there any glimmers of hope?*

AARNES: Yes, there was a bright spot in the program. AID had just started a new contraceptive social marketing project, separate from the government. It had taken my predecessor in the mission, Bill Jansen, several years to convince the government to approve the project, but he had done it. It was a huge accomplishment. Already, in just a year, the project was showing considerable success.

*Q: Could you explain what the social marketing project was?*

AARNES: It was a project to use commercial channels to provide family planning information and particularly contraceptives.

*Q: Were the commercial channels pharmacies?*

AARNES: A Pakistani pharmaceutical company was contracted to carry out the project. The company worked through pharmacies and through its other regular distribution outlets, and provided the products, commercial advertising and other support that that entailed. The company created a new brand of condoms named Sathi, which means "friend" or "pal" in Urdu. It marketed Sathi condoms to reach an audience of low-income customers who were not interested in using the family planning services offered by Pakistan government facilities or other private sector services, but who could not afford to pay for higher-priced brands of condoms on the market. And it was very successful in doing that.

*Q: What about other projects in population, or was it mainly the contraceptive social marketing project?*

AARNES: We continued to work with the Ministry of Population Welfare to help strengthen logistics management, communications, and other parts of the program.

*Q: Right. I remember there had been stories of the condoms that were balloons in the marketplace.*

AARNES: Not all of those stories were completely accurate, but they were told over and over for years. And in fact Pakistan's program had serious problems. It needed some fresh thinking and it needed to try out a few approaches that had proven to be effective in other family planning programs around the world. The Ministry of Population Welfare was our main counterpart and it was responsible for running the government's national family planning program. There were some highly skilled and dedicated professionals on their staff, but overall the ministry didn't have much capacity to carry out nationwide operations, and there was a certain reluctance to try new approaches which came from outside the country, especially in a sensitive area like family planning. Also, the population program got lip service from the government, but it was a low priority and it

didn't get any real political support.

*Q: Sounds dismal.*

AARNES: Yeah. The challenge was to find a way to get some high-level political support, and then to work with the Population Ministry to introduce some new activities, to get the ball rolling and be able to work with the provinces and at the district level to introduce new activities and demonstrate success. The AID mission had tried to do these things for a long time, but it had run into a lot of resistance.

*Q: Well, that seems to have been the pattern between the mission and the Pakistan government for more than ten years. It was deeply entrenched.*

AARNES: Right. But then something happened completely out of the blue. It was just nine days after I had arrived in Pakistan. General Zia, who was the very conservative and authoritarian president of Pakistan, was killed in a plane crash. The crash also killed Arnie Raphel, who was the U.S. ambassador, and Brigadier General Herb Wassom, who was the U.S. defense representative in Pakistan.

*Q: I remember that. It was incredible.*

AARNES: Yes. It was an enormous tragedy for the U.S. to lose our ambassador and our defense representative, and for Pakistan, it put the country in shock. Three months later, nationwide democratic elections were held, as required by the Pakistani constitution, and

Benazir Bhutto became the prime minister in late 1988. That ended 11 years of conservative authoritarian rule. The new government was interested in change and in demonstrating progress in improving people's lives. So all of a sudden, the door was open for AID to promote changes in the population program, as well as in other social sectors.

*Q: That's an amazing turn of events. How did you find a way to work with the new government?*

AARNES: Benazir Bhutto appointed a special advisor for the health and population sectors, and the advisor was eager to move forward and demonstrate progress right away, especially in the population sector. So we organized a trip for him and a few newly elected members of the National Assembly to visit Indonesia and Thailand and see the successful family planning programs in those countries. That convinced the advisor that we should do a presentation for the prime minister right away to help her understand why it was important for Pakistan to lower its population growth rate, and how that could be done. We suggested that the presentation be given through the RAPID project.

*Q: Why don't you describe RAPID, and I'd love to know what the response was.*

AARNES: RAPID was a project created by AID's Office of Population. RAPID stands for Resources for the Awareness of Population Impacts on Development. It was an interactive computer model that was designed for high-level policy makers to give them

an understanding of the impact of rapid population growth on their country's ability to achieve its development goals, and what would be needed to address it. The slide presentation could be prepared for each country to demonstrate the impact of rapid population growth rates on such sectors as education, health, labor, agriculture, urbanization, and energy.

When we organized the RAPID presentation for Benazir Bhutto, she brought along her whole cabinet to listen to it. She spent close to two hours on it.

*Q: Asking questions?*

AARNES: Yes. She was taking notes while she listened, and at the end she asked very perceptive questions. Immediately after the presentation, she asked to meet briefly with a few of her advisors and our small AID/embassy contingent, to go over main points and follow-up plans. She was impressive, very intelligent and well-informed.

*Q: Did it have any impact on the program?*

AARNES: It really did. Benazir was convinced by the RAPID presentation, and she made it clear to her cabinet that the government must address population growth seriously. The prime minister's support gave the whole population program a big boost with the conservative government bureaucracy. Then the RAPID presentation gave the whole population program another boost. It also energized the Population Welfare ministry and cemented AID's relationship with our ministry counterparts. They were thrilled with the success of RAPID and it put us all on the same team. The Population Secretary directed his staff to organize and lead RAPID presentations at the district level throughout the country. And AID also gained some credibility to try more new things.

*Q: That was a big breakthrough. How did you keep the momentum going?*

AARNES: We had done a lot of planning in the mission to focus on what was essential, from the top level to the bottom, in order for Pakistan to make significant progress in family planning. What we came up with were not brand new ideas in the population field worldwide. They were things that had been highlighted in analyses and evaluations of the Pakistan family planning program over more than two decades. We had decided to make a sustained push on five of the key items. The first item was to strengthen high-level support in the Pakistan government, and that got off to a great start with the RAPID presentation. The other key items we selected were to expand efforts to increase provision of family planning services through NGOs, to do some operations research and some field service delivery activities to demonstrate what kinds of services could be successful, to improve public information and communications about family planning, and to increase the provision of family planning services through health facilities.

*Q: How did you handle this list? What came first?*

AARNES: One of the first things we did was to persuade the Ministry of Population Welfare to agree to AID's increasing funding for work with NGOs, both local and US

NGOs. NGOs have been extraordinarily important in family planning programs around the world. They are the real foundation of many programs. The Pakistan government had been reluctant to work with local NGOs to provide family planning services, in addition to the government services, or to agree to bring in the technical and programmatic expertise of US NGOs. It may have been a matter of protecting their turf, or more likely that the ministry doubted that NGO approaches could work successfully in Pakistan. In any case, the ministry did eventually agree to AID's expanding support for local NGOs and to bringing in US NGOs to work with them.

*Q: So how did that go?*

AARNES: It went really well. The NGOs designed some new family planning projects, and they also built in careful documentation of the process and results. The projects were extremely successful. They demonstrated how improving the quality of family planning services and making them accessible to women could increase acceptance of family planning quickly, in every province and in poor, rural environments as well as in urban areas. A study showed that, in less than two years, contraceptive prevalence in these projects rose from an average of 12 percent to 33 percent. It nearly tripled.

*Q: And the next items on your list after that were...*

AARNES: We funded a couple of top experts from the Population Council in New York to come to Pakistan for a few years to work with the Population Welfare ministry to analyze program operations and conduct operations research to improve family planning services. The Pakistan population secretary developed a close working relationship with the Population Council team. In the past, the ministry had launched a number of ambitious national programs to reach communities, but the programs hadn't been analyzed and tested carefully, and had been unsuccessful. This time around, the Population secretary was so enthusiastic about the potential for improving results on a large scale that he decided to start a national village-based family planning workers program. But this time, the new program was based on a careful analysis of current program operations and a pilot study. The program got going in the next few years and I understand that it did a reasonable job of providing family planning services to more women.

And finally, we helped the Population Welfare ministry get technical assistance from the Johns Hopkins Population Communications Center, another AID worldwide project managed by AID/W. The ministry and Johns Hopkins worked together to produce a TV serial that was extremely popular throughout the country. They also broadcast high quality TV and radio spots on family planning that successfully reached nearly half of the target audience of women.

*Q: And then did the Ministry of Health get more active in providing family planning?*

AARNES: That was more difficult. We kept encouraging the Ministry of Health to provide family planning as part of its maternal and child services. The Pakistan government had instructed the health ministry some years earlier to include family

planning as a health measure, because it would have been extremely beneficial in a country where high fertility endangered the health of mothers and babies. Also, the health ministry had many more facilities and health workers to deliver services than the population ministry did. But the health ministry was not interested in doing that. They felt that this was the job of the population welfare ministry, and they themselves were already over-extended with other issues. A few years later, in the mid-1990s, I believe, the health ministry did incorporate family planning into the services offered by community health workers in a nationwide maternal and child health program.

*Q: Right. Can you describe the population ministry?*

AARNES: The Ministry of Population Welfare was AID's principal counterpart for population and family planning. It was a separate ministry, and it was much smaller than the health ministry. It was intended to be the focal point to carry out the government's policies regarding population and family planning. Population had been designated as a federal subject in Pakistan, which meant that the federal ministry had complete charge of the program, and there were no population ministers or secretaries at the provincial level. Population/family planning staff at the provincial and district level all reported directly to

the Population Welfare ministry in Islamabad. There were far fewer population welfare facilities and staff, nationwide, than health facilities and staff. By contrast, health had been designated a state subject, so each province had its own health ministry, in addition to the Ministry of Health at the federal level, and provincial health ministries had a full structure with staff down to the district level.

*Q: Right. So, were there other parts of the government there where you faced resistance in the population programs?*

AARNES: Actually, the biggest problem for the population program in Pakistan was not resistance from other parts of the government. The biggest problem was the lack of political support. The RAPID presentation had helped, but the program was still a relatively low priority. It was a good illustration of how crucial it is to reach policymakers from all sectors, right up to the top, because the most important constraints in any program may be far above the level of the sector ministry and far above the level of the minister for that sector. They are at the level of, for example, the prime minister or perhaps the finance minister. Those are the people who make the kinds of policy and budget decisions that determine whether a sector program will have the resources that give it a chance to succeed. Many important things can be done in operations at the ministry level and below, and that's where AID technical officers usually work. AID's programs can have a major role in strengthening government and non-government efforts. But a profound change is what is ultimately needed in Pakistan's development efforts, particularly in the social sectors. To raise budget levels for the education, health, and population sectors to where they need to be to make real progress requires political support at the very top.

*Q: At the very top. Yes. So, shifting to the other half of your portfolio, how did you*

*address health issues in Pakistan/*

AARNES: AID had had a big health program in Pakistan for years, and a new \$62 million child survival project was approved in 1988. Pakistan was one of AID's worldwide priorities for child survival assistance. The new project focused on supporting certain specific interventions, such as communications, and syringes and needles for the immunization program. It was closely linked with the work of other donors in order to create a strong and cohesive child survival effort nationwide. AID/Pakistan's health staff had spent more than a year developing the project. They had worked closely with counterparts from the federal Ministry of Health and all four provincial health departments. It was a textbook case of collaborative planning for development between the donor and the host country. The project had finally received AID approval, but a snag occurred: the Pakistan government had a rule prohibiting the project from undertaking any activities or spending any funds until it had been reviewed and approved by a top economic council, chaired by the prime minister. Eighteen more months passed while the Ministry of Health produced the lengthy document, called a PC-1, which was required for the review (we finally persuaded our colleagues in the Planning Ministry to help the Health Ministry draft the document). And then a time had to be found on the prime minister's schedule to chair the economic council's review of the project. The U.S. Ambassador, Robert Oakley, also interceded with the prime minister to urge the process along. The project did, eventually, get underway, after almost two years of intensive effort by AID and our counterparts in the Ministries of Health and Planning.

*Q: It was a time when the agency was really making a push on reducing infant mortality. I think there was a commitment to reach a certain level by 1990 so I imagine that progress in Pakistan was key to helping AID reach its goal.*

AARNES: Pakistan's infant mortality rate was very high, and the Pakistan government was determined to lower it. They had developed a strong immunization program in the early/mid 1980s, which was a source of great pride, but it had started to slow down, perhaps because the immunization program's very strong, charismatic leader, an army general, retired. The health ministry picked it up again and AID and the other donors worked with them to get it back on track.

*Q: What were some of the other health projects?*

AARNES: There was a project to reduce infant and young child deaths from diarrhea by promoting ORT (oral rehydration therapy) through social marketing of ORS (oral rehydration salts) and setting up ORS "corners" in hospitals to treat young children and train their mothers in administering ORS. There was also a primary health care project that focused on training female as well as male auxiliary health workers. There were research activities on diarrheal disease, through a project with HIID (Harvard Institute of International Development). And there was a long-term project to help strengthen the Pakistan government's malaria control program.

*Q: What were some of the accomplishments during that time?*

AARNES: In the health field, there was significant progress in the immunization program, communications, and social marketing, as well as in understanding and treating diarrheal diseases. In the population field, AID played the lead role among donors in getting family planning efforts moving in both the public sector and the private sector, bringing in NGOs to increase service delivery, raising contraceptive prevalence rates, and helping to strengthen key parts of the program, like communications, that had never been effective before.

*Q: Could you measure the actual impact of all these program accomplishments?*

AARNES: We had some data because we and the Population Welfare ministry decided to do the first Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in Pakistan in order to get really good baseline data for the programs. AID funded the Pakistan DHS in 1991 and that was the first DHS in the country. It yielded important data that Pakistan used for years. It provided key data for the child survival efforts and it also showed that some of the population program efforts were starting to work. Contraceptive use was going up and there was substantial interest among women and families in controlling the number and spacing of their children.

*Q: So, '91 was the baseline?*

AARNES: It was the baseline for the new programs in population. The previous baseline for contraceptive prevalence, from a different survey in the mid-1980s, was 6.9 percent, which is very low. This first DHS, in early 1991, showed a rise in contraceptive prevalence to around 12 percent. That was modest, but it was encouraging because it was a higher rate of increase than usual for Pakistan. It also showed that there was a substantial interest among women in controlling the number and spacing of their children. That indicated that if family planning services were good quality and accessible, many more women would be likely to use contraceptives.

*Q: Do you know what has happened to the population program since then?*

AARNES: In the next couple of years, contraceptive prevalence in Pakistan rose to over 20 percent. The program had started to gain momentum, once some key pieces were in place. Pakistan's annual population growth rate was falling. When I returned to Pakistan in 2007, the Pakistan Government was just announcing the results of the most recent DHS. It found that contraceptive prevalence had risen to 30 percent overall. Contraceptive prevalence is now 34 percent, according to the most recent DHS.

*Q: I imagine over that long period of time you must have seen some changes in the Pakistani institutions running these programs.*

AARNES: Yeah, some big changes. In 2007, I found that one of the institutions AID helped establish, the National Institute for Population Studies (NIPS), had become particularly important. AID helped establish NIPS in the mid-1980s and provided considerable assistance for a decade. That was essential in helping Pakistan develop the capacity to collect and analyze data to use in policy planning and in strengthening



programs. NIPS now works as part of the Ministry of Health and it is responsible for analyzing both population and health data.

*Q: That's an important success story. What were some of the factors behind AID's accomplishments in population and health?*

AARNES: On the Pakistan side, when Pakistan was chosen as a priority country for the worldwide effort to vaccinate young children, the Pakistan government named a highly respected army general to lead their immunization effort. He was an outstanding manager, and he coordinated efforts of all the donors to enable Pakistan to meet its goals.

For the population sector, a key factor on the Pakistan side was clearly the unexpected turnover of leadership in the Pakistan government and the opportunity for change that the new government provided. And although Benazir Bhutto was removed from government less than two years after she became prime minister, progress in the population program continued. There was a lot of interest and commitment in Pakistan's private sector, as well as in the Pakistan government, and some very capable people.

*Q: And on the AID side?*

AARNES: On the AID side, there were several major factors. One factor was the top-to-bottom approach we took in tackling the problems and a steady focus on the key program components. A second factor was our strong relationships with counterparts at all levels, from the top leadership to the district level. And a third factor was the continuity of effort over at least five years. Barbara Spaid, Heather Goldman, and Lois Bradshaw were exceptionally capable population and health officers. We worked with a team of talented and experienced FSNs who had been in the AID mission for years. M. Wasey and Dr. Rushna Ravji were two of the stars in our office, and there were many more. So, with that kind of continuity, we could see things through. We had very good relationships with our counterparts in the ministries over that time. It takes a lot of work and trust to develop those relationships, and it's impossible to develop them when the AID staff turns over every one or two years.

In addition, we had great leadership from Jim Norris, the Pakistan mission director. The U.S. ambassador, Robert Oakley, helped navigate the political ins and outs of the Pakistan government and get the attention of top leaders, including the prime minister, when we needed it.

*Q: That's interesting. So what are your main take-aways from this time?*

AARNES: Well, for me, the work in Pakistan was a lesson in patience, persistence, and the necessity of continuing to focus on the main objectives, the things that will really make a difference, when the situation was particularly frustrating. It was one of the hardest jobs I ever had and one of the most satisfying.

I think AID's work in Pakistan in the population sector during those years illustrates so

well how development works when the key components come together:

- When there is political support in the host government and they work with us as partners at all levels, with commitment to and local ownership of the activities;
- When there are enough resources: funding, technical expertise, and operational support;
- When the right people are in place on the U.S. side, in the mission and in Washington;
- When AID has a commitment to seeing the program through.

*Q: You mentioned that Ambassador Oakley was helpful in working with the Pakistan Government. So, how did Jim Norris get along with the embassy and the political team and how did you?*

AARNES: The relationship with the embassy worked well. Jim Norris had a good professional relationship with Ambassador Oakley, and the mission and embassy staffs got along well also. The ambassador liked to be kept generally informed about what AID was doing, but we operated largely independently of the embassy. He was very supportive of the AID program. When the mission had an important issue and needed some decision or action from the very top of the Pakistan government, we could ask the ambassador and he would often raise it with top leaders, even with the prime minister.

Ambassador Oakley treated USAID as part of the team, but he and the rest of the embassy never tried to tell us what to do in our development programs or how to do it. They would tell us if they needed help, such as, for example, talking with one of their counterparts or demonstrating AID's support in key areas, and we would work out a way to help them. AID staff would sometimes ask the embassy political and economic officers for advice on questions such as dealing with various political or business figures. The AID-embassy relationships were friendly and collegial, even when the issues were sensitive. The embassy also appointed one of its econ officers to sit in on AID's weekly senior staff meetings. That can sometimes be a red flag, frankly. But that didn't seem to be the case this time. The embassy representative was interested and enthusiastic about the mission's programs. She became a big AID supporter and interpreter to the embassy.

*Q: And she wasn't there to make decisions?*

AARNES: She wasn't there to make decisions or tell us what to do. She was there to learn about what we were doing and keep us informed about embassy interests and concerns that were relevant for our work. It was very constructive, a good model for embassy-AID relationships, with the embassy providing policy guidance and political insight, AID in charge of decisions about the assistance program, and close communication and collaboration throughout.

*Q: In your years in Pakistan, did you work with some of the local NGOs, and what did you think?*

AARNES: I worked with some Pakistani NGOs in the health sector, a number of which had done excellent work over several decades. We also had a project to work with local NGOs that were providing family planning services. In addition, the HPN office had a continuing relationship with the Family Planning Association of Pakistan, which was a notably strong organization, based in Lahore, and possibly the strongest NGO family planning service provider in Pakistan.

*Q: Did you have a chance to get to know any of the NGOs that didn't focus on health and family planning?*

AARNES: Yes, I did. Pakistan has some remarkable NGOs dedicated to improving the welfare of the poor, working with individuals and communities, and I learned a lot from them. The one that made the greatest impression on me was the Orangi Pilot Project, founded by Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. I want to talk about Dr. Khan for a few minutes because he made an enormous contribution to community development.

In the spring of 1989, I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet Dr. Khan. He was a Pakistani who had been born in British India in the early twentieth century. He moved to East Pakistan at Partition in 1947. In the late 1950s., Dr. Khan established the Comilla Model in East Pakistan, which became well-known worldwide as a comprehensive rural development program. His work there was a precursor to the famous Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which was established later by Professor Muhammad Yunus. Then in 1971, Dr. Khan moved to Karachi when East Pakistan split off and became Bangladesh, during Pakistan's civil war. He started a project in Orangi, which was a squatter settlement in Karachi. Orangi had a population of about one million from many different ethnic groups, including impoverished newcomers to the city who came from all over Pakistan and the region. There was constant tension and unrest in Orangi. Nearly every time there was some kind of unrest in Karachi, which happened often, the Orangi settlement would go up in flames and there would be a lot of violence.

So, Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan and a group of university students started a community program, the Orangi Pilot Project, in this extraordinarily difficult environment. They met with leaders of the community, tried to bring in whomever they could, and held long discussions about the community's needs and interests. The conversations continued until the community members decided what their highest priorities were, what they all agreed to do, and how they were going to work together. The first thing they decided to do was get the sewage out of the streets, so they did a sewage and waste treatment program. Then they repeated the process of sitting together and talking until the community leaders decided what their next priority was, and they moved sector by sector in Orangi, tackling the community's development problems.

I had wanted to meet Dr. Khan because I had heard that in Orangi, the contraceptive prevalence rate was 45 percent. And since the contraceptive prevalence rate was 6.9 percent nationwide and Orangi was a diverse squatter settlement, I wondered how that had been achieved. One of my Pakistani colleagues, who was very well connected politically, had a friend in the Pakistan People's Party, the PPP, who worked with the

Orangi community. So the friend arranged the meeting and took me to see Dr. Khan.

*Q: Sounds like a great opportunity. Talk about the meeting.*

AARNES: Dr. Khan met with me and a couple of others for almost four hours. He described how the community development process had proceeded and what had been accomplished. It was fascinating. It was community development the way you've always heard it should be done. The group had a 15-to-one rule: for any project that the community wanted to do, if you translate it into dollars, say, 15 dollars' worth would come from the community for every one dollar that could come from outside donations. Dr. Khan explained that the rule was essential because soft money drives away hard money – the soft money being the donation and the hard money being the community's own input. And the Orangi Pilot Project stuck to that rule. I asked him how the community had decided to do family planning and why it came so late in the game, after they had introduced preventive and curative health, education, and a number of other interventions. Dr. Khan said that he and his student helpers were afraid to mention family planning because they thought it would be too sensitive, but then when they did and the community decided to introduce it, it worked.

The Orangi Pilot Project was an extraordinary example of successful community development. With all the poverty, diversity and tension, the community made significant progress in a number of development areas, and when there were big flare ups in Karachi, the Orangi settlement usually stayed peaceful.

*Q: Do you happen to know what happened to that community? Were you able to go back to Karachi years later?*

AARNES: I did go to Karachi a few times in the past ten years, but I couldn't go to Orangi for security reasons. I believe the Orangi Pilot Project may still exist, but as a smaller research project.

*Q: So, even in this very poor community, they had the resources to put up in the 15 to one ratio.*

AARNES: They probably worked out what their contribution would have to be in labor and other non-monetary contributions. But they did it, and it succeeded. For years after I met Akhter Hameed Khan, I tried to figure out how it would be possible for Pakistan to get 50 of him.

*Q: He was probably also very charismatic, too.*

AARNES: Yes, he was. When I met him he was dignified, straightforward, and charismatic, a big, grave man in his mid-70s, carefully explaining the process, step by step. Nearly 20 years later, when I was at a reception in Islamabad, I met Shoaib Sultan, who founded the Agha Khan Rural Support Program, AKRSP, which is a very well known community development program in Pakistan's northern areas. As we were chatting about development in Pakistan, I mentioned that meeting Akhter Hameed Khan

was one of the most memorable experiences of my career. Shoaib Sultan's face brightened, and he said, "Akhter Hameed Khan was my mentor!" He had been trained by Akhter Hameed Khan and had then started AKRSP. So I guess there are a few more Dr. Khans in Pakistan.

*Q: A real giant. What other issues were coming up at that time?*

AARNES: Well, an important concern in Pakistan during that time was the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The relationship between the two countries had gone up and down over the decades, although, during the five-year period when I was posted there, there was a foundation of friendship that remained, based on the experience of the U.S. and Pakistan's working together in the 1960s and early 1970s on problems that were important to both countries, where our objectives matched. Still, there had been some touchiness on the Pakistan side and some exasperation on the US side concerning development issues. Over the years, so many ambitious development efforts in Pakistan haven't succeeded, even though there are many highly capable people in the government and private sector. AID did maintain very good relationships during that period. I also learned, from observing Jim Norris, not to let exasperation get the better of me; you just focus on what it is we want to achieve and be very clear and respectful about that. Provide all the help we can to achieve our common objectives. Be ready to walk away, if it seems that our objectives don't match, but always with respect and without a personal edge.

*Interesting. How were Pakistan's relationships with other donors?*

AARNES: Those relationships could be prickly too. One of my senior colleagues in Pakistan's Ministry of Population Welfare told me that, in around 1986 or 1987, the ministry had cut off its relationship and its program with the World Bank. The ministry had told the Bank, in effect, "We don't need you here anymore, go away."

*Q: Because?*

AARNES: Because the relationship was so poor, the programs were not successful, and the Bank didn't have resident support there.

*Q: They just blew in when they felt like it?*

AARNES: That's how the Pakistanis saw it. My colleague said, "They didn't live here, they didn't work with us, they just flew in every few months and told us what we were doing wrong. They were never here to help us." A couple of years after that, the population ministry and the World Bank made up, and the Bank did develop a larger staff to give some day-to-day assistance. That incident underscores one of AID's great strengths overseas, which is to have missions with staff right there on the ground to help out, and to develop the relationships with their counterparts and a trust and assurance that both sides are moving in the same direction.

*Q: Right. Well, I think the Bank in later years tried to emulate AID somewhat and tried to*

*build some country structures.*

AARNES: Yes, and that helped. But during the period 1988 until 1993, when I served in Pakistan, AID was working with our Pakistani counterparts on long-term development programs, but at the same time Pakistan was going through a particularly turbulent time domestically. The plane crash that killed the President of Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq as well as U.S. Ambassador Arnie Raphel, the U.S. military attaché Brig. General Herb Wassom, and other top Pakistani military officials was cataclysmic. Pakistan held elections approximately 90 days after the plane crash. The Pakistanis were extremely excited about the elections. I remember a Pakistani woman commenting to me, “In the U.S., you get to have elections all the time, but we haven’t had elections for 11 years.” When Benazir Bhutto, the Pakistan People’s Party leader, was elected and became the prime minister, she faced immense challenges the whole time she was in office.

*Q: Not because she was a woman but because she represented the Bhutto faction, right?*

AARNES: That’s right, although it may have been more difficult for Benazir because she was the first democratically elected female leader of a Muslim-majority country. And although Benazir was well educated, extremely intelligent, and a charismatic politician, she did not surround herself with good advisors.

Another major incident occurred in February 1989, just a couple of months after Benazir took office, when she had gone to China for her first visit. Public anger had been whipped up about Salman Rushdie’s book “Satanic Verses.” So, while the prime minister was out of the country, a mob stormed into Islamabad and surrounded the American Center. “Satanic Verses” wasn’t actually an American issue because Salman Rushdie is British, but the mob used the American Center as a symbol and tried to set it on fire. Five protestors were killed during that attack, as well as a guard in the building across the street. Also, that same month, Soviet troops, who had been in Afghanistan for about a decade, pulled out and went back to the Soviet Union. Then in 1990, there was a huge uptick in tensions between India and Pakistan. The two countries were on the brink of war through the early summer of 1990.

*Q: So, what kind of additional security did you have?*

AARNES: Guards posted on our houses 24 hours a day – before that, the guards had only been there at night. And razor wire was put around the embassy.

*Q: But you still could go out to see your projects?*

AARNES: Yes, we still could go out, which was fortunate because that was a key part of our work, to keep in touch with the work in the field, assure that the projects were moving forward.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: Benazir was ousted in the beginning of August of 1990. There were elections in the fall and the PPP was thrown out. The Pakistan Muslim League, the PML, came to

power and Nawaz Sharif became the prime minister for the first time.

At that point, under the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, one key provision for assistance to Pakistan was the Pressler Amendment, named for Senator Larry Pressler. The Pressler Amendment said that military and economic assistance and military sales to the Government of Pakistan would only continue if the U.S. president certified every year that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush failed to certify that, which meant that Pakistan could not get any more assistance.

*Q: So, the certifications had come in the past although I think people knew that there probably was a nuclear program being developed. So what changed that the president decided to basically pull the plug?*

AARNES: Well, there was a lot of discussion in the Pakistani press about it. They noted that it was an interesting coincidence that President Bush failed to certify that just after the Soviets had left Afghanistan.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: The first Gulf War started in January of 1991. For the embassy community in Pakistan, there was an ordered departure of all U.S. non-essential personnel and all dependents, so my husband had to take our children back to the U.S. One of us had to take care of the children, since we didn't have other family members who could do it, and there was a U.S. Foreign Service officer on his staff who could stay and supervise his office. Most US contractors and USPSCs were evacuated too. A skeleton crew of U.S. staff remained in Pakistan during the war. The Government of Pakistan did its best to make sure we were all safe. Nothing ever happened to a U.S. official or U.S. citizen or an FSN during that time.

*Q: Right. Could you do any work at that time or were you just trying to hold things together?*

AARNES: The evacuation lasted just over three months. AID hadn't been through many evacuations at that point, so there wasn't a great deal of experience in the agency about how to manage them. The staff that was evacuated went to Washington, got some space in a commercial office building and did their best to find useful things to do. But at post we had a lot to do. The few Americans left at post, along with the FSN staff, were trying to hold everything together. We did not meet with anyone in the Government of Pakistan through the entire period. During that period, also, discussions in Washington in the Administration and on the Hill were going on about how to undertake the phase-out of AID assistance that was required under the Pressler Amendment. We spent a great deal of time going back and forth with Washington on that process.

Being at post during an evacuation or being evacuated are both difficult and unsettling experiences. Part of it is the uncertainty. You don't know when you're going to see your family again and you don't know how long the evacuation is going to go on. Many more

AID and State staff have been through evacuations since then, unfortunately.

*Q: Did you ever feel personally threatened?*

AARNES: No. I never did, but it was a very tense time. There was an American woman in the mission who was a local-hire PSC, and was living alone without embassy security and a guard. So when my family left, her office director suggested that she move in with me. We became very good friends. We watched CNN, which had just come to Pakistan, and helped plan morale-boosting activities for the lonely Americans left at post.

*Q: Can you talk more about the Pressler Amendment and planning for the program phase-out?*

AARNES: The Pressler Amendment required that programs be brought to an orderly close. The phase-out was not supposed to be abrupt, leaving white elephants behind like, for example, leaving a building half-built, or cutting off other programs so quickly that much of the effort already made would be useless. The mission had a \$700 million pipeline, and the question was how much of that could be used to wind down the mission's ongoing projects. Any funds that could not be justified as part of the orderly close-out had to be returned to the U.S. Treasury. AID's negotiations on the Pressler Amendment with the State Department and the Hill went on into the summer of 1991. Then, with the Gulf War evacuation over and all the American staff back at post, we negotiated the phase-out of each program with the Government of Pakistan, project by project, which specific activities were going to go forward and which weren't.

*Q: And the government must have been fairly annoyed that the U.S. was pulling out. Was it hard to negotiate?*

AARNES: It was not as hard as you might expect. For one thing, any funds that we couldn't agree on how to use would have to be sent back to the U.S. Government, not to Pakistan, so we were all motivated to come to an agreement on how to use them for development activities in Pakistan. But a lot of credit also goes to our Pakistani colleagues for working with us calmly and reasonably. We all realized that the Pressler Amendment was the law, and it spelled out what we had to do. We were generally on the same wavelength with our counterparts sector by sector on what was most important to accomplish. So, we would have discussions about priorities within each specific project. For example, in the child survival project, the new head of Pakistan's immunization program wanted all pipeline funding from the project to be used for syringes and needles, a big block of equipment. While that was a good cause, some funds were needed to bring an orderly close to other parts of that project as well. The negotiations were not bitter and adversarial, as a rule. On the other hand, it was certainly true that Government of Pakistan officials stopped showing up in such great numbers for AID's receptions, signing ceremonies, and other events.

In the fall of 1992, the new AID mission director, John Blackton, tried hard to keep Washington from closing the mission. He instructed my office to put forward a new project for a private sector family planning program, one that would not have involved



the Pakistan government at all. That would have been acceptable under the Pressler Amendment, because the amendment prohibited assistance only to the government, not to the private sector. From our perspective, continuing AID support for key parts of Pakistan's family planning effort would have helped keep the effort from faltering. The project got strong support from the technical and program side in Washington, but it was vetoed by the agency's leadership. They had committed to closing a certain number of AID missions worldwide, and that commitment took priority over finding a way to help sustain the progress that had been achieved in slowing Pakistan's population growth.

*Q: And what about relations with other donors in Pakistan? Did they understand why you had to phase down the program? Because the U.S. must have had the largest assistance program by far. And people must have been worried that they were going to have to pick up the pieces.*

AARNES: They were. AID had been by far the largest and strongest donor, so we worked with the other donors wherever we could to organize the transition. A major effort was the World Bank's new Social Action Program, which was a \$200 million program that was just beginning at the time I left post. We worked with them closely to define what the Social Action Program would do in the health, population, and education sectors.

*Q: So, they could pick up some of the pieces?*

AARNES: Yes, and they did pick up donor leadership in the social sectors. Some of our top FSNs went to work for them, and that was helpful.

The Pressler Amendment requirements dragged out the grim process of closing down the AID program for almost three years. The mission's doors finally closed in early 1995. My family and I left Pakistan in mid-1993. Most of the projects my husband and I worked on had ended by that time, and all of the mission's programs were over by about the middle of 1994.

*Q: So, they basically were living on the pipeline?*

AARNES: Living on the pipeline as they worked to get a few important things finished. During that time the mission's staff got smaller and smaller, both U.S. staff and FSNs. As soon as the phaseout began, of course, the AID FSNs and contractor staff started looking around for other jobs. For the direct hire staff, we would just transfer to another post, but FSNs and contractors needed to figure out what they were going to do to support their families. So our carefully negotiated closeouts were constantly disrupted. We would set up a smooth project closeout plan with the Pakistan government, and then the chief of party would leave, perhaps with a year still to go before the project ended, and of course there wasn't a way to replace them. That's just the way it goes.

*Q: Right. And the FSNs all found or mainly found other jobs too?*

AARNES: Yes. AID's Pakistani staff was the envy of other donors. Our FSNs fanned out

across the donor community as the mission's closeout crept along. They were hired into highly responsible jobs, and significantly strengthened the staffs of those organizations. From time to time, I still see some of the former FSNs. One of the FSNs, who was the junior person working on the family planning social marketing project, went on to work for a number of donors and is now in Washington working for the World Bank. Another FSN, who had worked on the child survival project, joined the World Bank's Social Action Program. After a few years, she came to the U.S., worked for several NGOs, and then became a U.S. Civil Service employee working in AID/Washington. When I was in Tajikistan a few years ago, a man came up to my table in the Hyatt Hotel restaurant in Dushanbe and introduced himself. He was another of the FSNs who had worked on the health projects, and he had gone on to work for DfID, the British aid agency (Department for International Development).

*Q: So, USAID was a good stepping stone for a lot of them?*

AARNES: Yes. It worked out well for most of them. Pakistan was a wonderful place to work, until the phaseout started.

*Q: With the resources to do something.*

AARNES: Yes, with resources and good colleagues to work with, it was fantastic. *Q: Great. So, where did you go after you left Pakistan?*

AARNES: After Pakistan, my husband and I were assigned to Ukraine. We had about four months of training in Russian at FSI (Foreign Service Institute), the only time we ever had full-time language training. Four months was much shorter than FSI's usual

Russian course, but AID had cut short approvals for language training because the new missions in the former Soviet Union desperately needed staff. Fortunately, we learned enough so that we could function while we were in Ukraine, where the government was still conducted in Russian and all the university education was in Russian. And we both continued to take Russian lessons at post for the entire time we were there.

When we arrived in Ukraine in January 1994, it was just over two years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine's government systems and the economy had collapsed. USAID had had four Foreign Service officers in Ukraine plus a few FSNs for about a year before that, and the goal now was to staff up and become a full-service regional mission.

*Q: Did you have earmarked money for Ukraine?*

AARNES: We got an earmark, which was promoted mainly by Senator Mitch McConnell. The program was funded with Freedom Support Act funds.

*Q: Right. So, another instance where money was not the problem; you had the resources.*

AARNES: Money was not the problem. Ukraine was very different from the environments that AID was accustomed to working in. It was not a developing country

and it was just coming out from under Soviet rule. Kiev looked like a 1940s movie, very different from the modern western world. The levels of education and cultural sophistication were very high. Ukrainians had not had much contact with outsiders because everything had operated through the Soviet system and had been directed from Moscow. So once the Soviet Union collapsed, it was as though all institutions and activities had had their heads chopped off. Photographs of elderly people standing in long lines went around the world. The government's collapse hit the elderly especially hard because their pensions had disappeared, and any savings they had had were worthless because of inflation. Ukraine was desperately short of energy; energy had always come from Russia, very cheaply, until suddenly the rates skyrocketed.

In AID, we were looking at how to help the country move from being a communist state to being a modern state in a capitalist system. We were also dealing with setting up the U.S. relationship and USAID programs in Ukraine. The new mission was intended to cover Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. The earmark, when it came, was \$250 million a year, including \$225 million for Ukraine and \$25 million split between Moldova and Belarus. It was one of the agency's largest programs in the world.

*Q: And you arrived in January. Was life difficult for you?*

AARNES: Life was difficult for everyone. The winter of 1994 was Ukraine's coldest winter in about 75 years. On weekends, we rode the trams around Kiev. I never knew where I was because the ice on the inside of the tram windows was so thick it was impossible to see through it. There was no way to stay warm. Food was scarce and the quality of what there was, was poor. It was difficult to find housing for the AID staff. We put our children into an American international school that had been started a year before by a private U.S. company, Quality Schools International (QSI). QSI then rented a couple of rooms from a Ukrainian school. The Ukrainian school wasn't receiving enough money from the Ukrainian government to continue functioning, so they needed to be a bit entrepreneurial and rent out rooms. There wasn't much heat in the building; the children in the American school wore long underwear and four layers of clothes. And winter in Ukraine is long.

*Q: Sounds like a grim time.*

AARNES: It was incredibly grim. Much of the population was penniless and was dealing with the extreme cold, food scarcity, and general weakening of the health system and essentially all other parts of government.

*Q: We heard subsequently that Russia resented the U.S. coming in and doing these programs. Did you get the sense when you were in Ukraine that they were resentful of the U.S.?*

AARNES: Not exactly. Of course, there was still a very strong influence from the Soviet Union, and the Ukrainians had been part of the Soviet system. So, I think some might have felt resentful. But many Ukrainians didn't have the same sense that some Russians seemed to have, that their power had been taken from them and that they had to prove

that they were still big and important in the world. At the same time, Ukrainians didn't want to be treated as though their culture and civilization had disappeared. They didn't want Americans to assume they were ignorant. I remember one instance where an older person – middle aged, not young like the FSNs in the mission – questioned me carefully about whether I thought Ukraine was a developing country, like the African countries AID worked with. She was clearly relieved when I said that Ukraine's economy was going through a difficult time, but Ukraine wasn't similar to a country in Africa.

*Q: What were some of the main problems in setting up the new mission?*

AARNES: One of the biggest problems was staffing. AID's staffing always seems to lag far behind program budgets. For the first couple of years, the mission staff was ridiculously small in relation to the program size. At one point, AID's program in Ukraine was the third or fourth largest bilateral program worldwide, but it was number 32 in staff size. It took a few years for the mission to get adequate staff. Part of the reason was that AID's personnel system doesn't move fast. But it was also hard to find AID employees who wanted to come to Ukraine. The winters were cold, the language was difficult, and, perhaps most important, Ukraine was not the kind of environment that AID people had ever envisioned as part of their development careers. It took a long time for the region to be integrated into the agency. The mission also had to hire FSNs, none of whom, of course, had ever worked for the U.S. Government or for American private sector companies.

*Q: But they had English?*

AARNES: Yes. The FSNs' English skills varied, but they were generally quite good and they improved quickly on the job. Some of the FSNs who had been English majors spoke a little like people out of a 19<sup>th</sup> century English novel. It was very elegant.

The people we hired were almost all young, in their twenties to early thirties. They were very well educated and very enthusiastic. I think working for the U.S. government might have seemed like just too much of a transition for people who were older.

*Q: Right. The U.S. had been the enemy.*

AARNES: It had been the enemy for their whole lives. Also, among older people, their English generally wasn't as good.

Not being in Moscow, most Ukrainians had never met an American. Ukrainians in general knew very little about the United States, so they didn't know anything about American standards or habits. They didn't know about our work ethic. Overall, the mission had great FSNs, a number of whom, fortunately for the mission, are still there. But it was interesting that, in the first couple of years, some of them weren't accustomed to things like promptness, getting things done well and insisting on quality.

*Q: So, what happened when someone shows up two hours late or turns in a piece of work that was clearly substandard? Was it awkward correcting them?*

AARNES: Yes, but not terribly. They would usually be apologetic and a bit surprised. They weren't defensive. It probably helped that most of them were in their twenties, so they weren't used to being the boss and being treated deferentially. Every now and then we'd talk about differences between the two cultures. A number of Ukrainians pointed out that Americans work very hard and are very goal-oriented: what is the goal, how are you going to reach the goal, and how fast are you going to get there.

Over time, of course, the size and experience of the mission's FSN workforce grew exponentially. The leading FSNs became, and still are, the backbone in guiding and supporting AID's work in Ukraine. I remained in touch with them and still have FSN friends from those years.

For a time, it seemed as though there was no functioning government in Ukraine. The Soviet Union had been dissolved and Ukrainians were not used to operating independently, without that superstructure. There was a sense of drifting without anyone steering. For a long time, there weren't many procedures to govern operations and relationships. So, as we put together the new AID program, we tried to figure out, for example, who in the government needed to be included in discussing new development projects. I started the tour being in charge of the democracy and governance projects and the health projects, and coordinating the many NGOs coming to Ukraine to work.

*Q: But not many domestic NGOs?*

AARNES: Not many domestic NGOs. There hadn't been much that was non-government in the USSR. At first, we could just sign the agreements between AID and a local NGO, because there wasn't any firm government procedure in place. After a while, the government did assert itself and some of the communist-era bureaucracy came back and started a registration program for NGOs, which basically meant that very few NGOs got registered.

*Q: Is that because you had to pay a little bit under the table?*

AARNES: The government bureaucracy didn't like these separate groups. They didn't seem to like the idea of having anything separate from the government. There may have been bribery involved, but I was not aware of it related to US-funded projects.

In the first few years, there wasn't much cohesion in the government and there didn't seem to be strong lines of authority from the president and prime minister down to the ministries. Some of the ministries could act as almost independent powers. The AID mission experienced a dramatic example of this in late 1995. The mission was working in rented space on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of a building that was under the control of the Ukrainian Ministry of Industry. The mission was having space renovated in another building in another part of Kiev, which was much bigger and better suited to our needs as the mission expanded. Well, like 100 percent of all renovations in Ukraine, work on AID's new space was way behind schedule. The lease on our current space was about to expire, so the mission kept telling the Minister of Industry that our new space wasn't ready, and we would pay the rental cost to extend our stay for another month on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor in his

building. And finally, after a few months of extensions, the minister turned off the mission's lights and the telephone.

*Q: Time for you to leave?*

AARNES: I guess so. It wasn't quite clear why the minister did that, because AID was paying the rent every month and no other tenant was lined up to take the space. The minister's action was extremely unusual for Ukraine at that time. The U.S. government didn't have any on-going issues with the minister. It was said that the minister was making a show of power to impress his Ukrainian political opponents in some kind of domestic political dispute, but we never found out for sure. It was a bizarre situation.

The mission's electricity and telephone were cut off for four weeks. It happened to occur right when the U.S. Government had closed down, between December and January in 1995-96.

*Q: Right, the furlough.*

AARNES: Exactly. So, there wasn't much of anyone in Washington whose attention we could get. In Kiev, we talked to everybody we could think of up to the deputy prime ministers who were the AID mission's close counterparts. They were appalled and said they would talk to the Minister of Industry. But the Minister of Industry wouldn't budge. The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine thought the AID mission should acquiesce, and just move out to an empty warehouse 45 minutes away. We resisted that because it would have been very expensive and would have brought our work to a complete halt for at least a few weeks. And it seemed as though giving in to the pressure of this minister would have sent an odd signal about Ukraine's relationship with the U.S.

*Q: It certainly would.*

AARNES: At that time of year, there was very little daylight. The sun was up only between about 9:30 and 3:30. Without electricity, we couldn't use space heaters. There was only the heat supplied to the whole building, which was minimal. The mission staff spent most of the time trying to stay warm. Everyone on my staff gathered in my office because it had windows that let in light and a little bit of heat from the sun. The FSN who was in charge of IT for the mission tapped into the telephone lines of the ministry so that the mission would have one telephone line coming in. The elevator for the building was still running, so we would get off the elevator on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor and step into total darkness. Then we would see a little flicker of candlelight in the distance, and go toward it and greet whoever was sitting at the reception desk next to the candle and that one telephone line. Every few days, the ministry would find out that AID had tapped into the telephone line and cut it off. Then our IT expert would tap into another line. This went on for four weeks. It turned out, as I mentioned, that the issue may have had nothing much to do with the United States. The minister may have been making a show of strength in a domestic political fight.

*Q: Had nothing—you were just collateral damage.*

AARNES: Yes, right.

*Q: What I'm struck by as you tell that story is this was a situation where you had no leverage. And there's almost no country program I can think of where you wouldn't have some kind of leverage, even in a very hostile situation.*

AARNES: Absolutely. In part, it indicates how fluid Ukraine's government was at that time and its lack of experience in dealing with foreign assistance organizations. But the main difference was that, in most other situations, a U.S. ambassador would have interceded to make sure AID was well treated. Our ambassador at that time was focused on doing what the Ukrainians wanted in order to build a friendly relationship, even in a situation like this with a rogue minister. And I also wonder whether, if the U.S. government had not been on furlough, the incident might not have happened. The AID mission director was on leave in the U.S. during that whole time and was not reachable. We did make contact with one high level State visitor who directed the ambassador to fix it. The ambassador said he would fix it, but the visitor went back to Washington and the ambassador didn't move. A couple more weeks passed, then the furlough ended and people came back to work in Washington. The ambassador got his orders from Washington to fix it and that was the end of it. The electricity and telephones were turned on within a day. It was an uneasy period between the mission and the ambassador.

*Q: I would think so. The ambassador didn't understand how difficult the working situation was or didn't want to ruffle feathers?*

AARNES: He didn't want to ruffle feathers and he didn't think it was important. But, for AID, moving to a far-away warehouse would have been enormously disruptive, far more disruptive than 30 days of being able to have just a few hours of daylight. And giving up would not have been a good signal to the Ukrainians.

*Q: Yes.*

AARNES: It was quite odd because the U.S. seldom gets treated like this and Ukraine was a strong ally. That incident also says something about embassy-AID relationships in Ukraine. It was an interesting contrast with Pakistan, for example.

*Q: Right, where you had Ambassador Oakley very supportive.*

AARNES: Ambassador Oakley was very supportive and very experienced. Also, there had been AID programs in Pakistan for decades, and many embassy officers knew what development programs were because they had been working in South Asia. In Ukraine, many of the embassy staff were new to the Department, and they were all struggling to establish an embassy. Very few if any of them knew anything about AID. They didn't know what we were, who we were or why we were there. In the AID mission, the tiny staff was struggling too and some of them were new to their jobs. So some of the usual systems and norms hadn't been put in place. This was apparent as soon as we arrived at

post. For example, the RSO (Regional Security Officer) didn't know where my husband and I lived with our children. Our little house met almost none of the embassy's security guidelines. The nurse in the health unit had refused to deal with an AID Foreign Service officer because she didn't know that AID was a U.S. Government agency and that AID staff are entitled to services. That was particularly serious because Ukraine's health services were poor.

*Q: So, in addition to trying to work relations with Ukraine you had to work within the U.S. Government system that was not functioning well.*

AARNES: Right. We were all struggling. All staff at post needed guidance, particularly in understanding the role of different U.S. agencies at post. When we arrived, we found that one of our embassy colleagues, a very bright junior officer, felt that she was in charge of supervising the AID director and the AID staff, apparently with the ambassador's blessing. That caused some confusion and friction for a while. We did develop very constructive working relationships with our embassy counterparts over the course of the first year. But that was the first time I encountered embassy officers who felt they had supervisory and decision-making authority over AID, over what we did and who we met with. They felt that they were the lead representatives of the U.S. Government for development. That was particularly unfortunate because it led to program delays and detracted from overall USG effectiveness.

*Q: Do you think that's what they were hearing from the coordinator in Washington?*

AARNES: Well, that might have been part of it too, although it did not appear that there was a great deal of communication between the coordinator and the embassy.

*Q: What was the mission's relationship with the coordinator?*

AARNES: The first Washington coordinator for assistance to the Newly Independent States (NIS) was Richard Morningstar. His relationship with AID was often adversarial. He thought it was his role to control AID. He was focused on splitting off a significant portion of the AID assistance program budget for Ukraine in order to provide funds to other U.S. Government departments. He and his staff scrutinized AID's programs in minute detail. They tracked every penny and demanded repeated justifications for every project activity. They absorbed enormous amounts of the mission staff's time, and refused to allow on-going AID projects to receive incremental funding until the project pipelines were down to nine to 12 months. That small a pipeline is well below the agency standard and puts the projects in danger of running out of money before new funds are available. Since I was the mission's program officer at that time, I knew the status of the programs of other U.S. departments. It seemed that Morningstar thought that funding for energy programs in Ukraine, for example, should be given to the U.S. Department of Energy because they're the USG's energy experts. But when the Department of Energy received the funds, it didn't have the expertise to run overseas development programs. So it eventually hired AID contractors. As I remember, the pipelines for programs with those departments were very, very long. For the Department of Energy, the pipeline was 42



months. Nothing was moving. It was extraordinarily frustrating.

*Q: Well, yes, absolutely.*

AARNES: It was a waste of time and opportunity. Later on, Richard Morningstar served in the Obama Administration as the ambassador in Azerbaijan, and he strongly supported the AID program there. His perspective had changed, clearly.

*Q: So, he learned. A little late but yes, he did learn. Overall, do you think you accomplished anything in Ukraine?*

AARNES: Yes, AID did accomplish important things in Ukraine in those years. In the democracy and governance sector, one of the first things AID did was help set up the mechanisms for presidential and parliamentary elections, with support from IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems). NDI (National Democratic Institute) and IRI (International Republican Institute) received large grants to work with local organizations and to train candidates running for the first time in multi-party elections. In the economic growth sector, the work that was done privatizing small enterprises and reforming the banking system was very important.

In the health sector, the Hospital Partnership program was particularly strong. It arranged exchanges and training on key issues for selected hospitals in all countries of the former Soviet Union. We could pair that project with another project being carried out by the NGO Counterpart. Counterpart was getting a lot of hospital equipment from U.S. military bases that were closing in Europe. The equipment helped upgrade major hospitals, and Counterpart trained the hospital staff how to use it. The Hospital Partnership project staff that I worked with commented that hospitals in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus were similar to U.S. hospitals in the 1950s, but they could be upgraded to a much higher level of functioning. Through the project with Counterpart, we also worked with NGOs that gave assistance to people in need, such as the sick, the elderly, and orphans.

*Q: Were there food aid programs?*

AARNES: No, but there were programs to help address issues in agriculture production and marketing. There were also programs, longer-term efforts, to address energy needs.

Establishing a well-functioning AID mission in Ukraine was another big accomplishment. During those years, the AID staff in Ukraine set up a mission, hired and trained staff, and developed and carried out a coherent program strategy. We developed the systems, processes, and relationships to keep our operations moving smoothly. This was quite a feat in a country that the USG had never worked in, and in which the government and the economy were in a state of collapse. I think the Congress and the Administration had underestimated the tremendous effort that was required to get embassies, AID missions, and other USG operations set up in the former Soviet Union. These things took much of our attention in the first few years.

*Q: Not what the agency was used to. What were some of the biggest challenges?*

AARNES: Staffing was one of the biggest challenges. When we arrived in Ukraine in January 1994, the AID mission consisted of four U.S. direct hire employees, plus a couple of personal service contractors (PSCs) and a handful of FSNs who were completely new to working with Americans. So for the first few years, the mission staff was too small to be able to exercise coordination or oversight for what was going on. AID/Washington bureaus had developed some project activities for Ukraine and were implementing them, but often the mission staff had never been informed about them. Some of these activities came out of the NIS, the Newly Independent States task force, but more of them came from other bureaus in AID because there was no system for reviewing and coordinating new projects in the region to make sure they could be effective and non-duplicative. That all took a while to bring together.

*Q: And all in a region the U.S. didn't know much about.*

AARNES: Right. A number of Ukrainian-American NGOs received funding, and a few of them could be surprisingly difficult to deal with, from the AID perspective. Some didn't want to deal with us at all unless it was absolutely necessary. For some of them, for example, if we asked how they were doing in their programs, or just asked them for a paragraph for a monthly cable to Washington with news about what each project was accomplishing, they would tell us to go jump in a lake because that requirement wasn't written into their grant so they were darned if they would give us a paragraph. You could say that these grantees lost an opportunity to publicize their accomplishments more widely, and made it much more difficult for AID to keep the Administration and Congress fully informed about what was going on in Ukraine. But these grantees didn't see the need to have anything to do with AID except to get the money.

*Q: And they would go to their supporters on the Hill and complain.*

AARNES: Absolutely. It was a surprisingly hostile environment. In the U.S., neither the public sector nor the private sector had much experience in these formerly communist countries. At the point that AID began to work in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the assumption in the U.S. seemed to be that what the people of the new post-Soviet countries needed was to be introduced to capitalism, and to learn how the private sector worked in the United States.

*Q: And then it would just take off.*

AARNES: And then it would take off. But that assumption wasn't based on an understanding of those new countries. It also didn't come from a good understanding of change: what it takes to change people's attitudes, behavior and institutions, and what kind of effort will bring results. It was very clear that such a big change in Ukraine would require a sustained effort.

*Q: Right. Did it surprise you that corruption in Ukraine has really flourished and that they went back to a fairly autocratic leader?*

AARNES: Sadly, it was not a surprise. There are many things that AID and other parts of

the U.S. government and private sector can help with. But there may be other factors that are deep-rooted that keep democracy from flourishing and allow corruption to continue. Ukraine, especially with the Russian influence, is particularly vulnerable. On the other hand, some of the FSNs have been active in politics, some of them left the mission and ran for office, and others have spouses who are very active in politics. They're working to make Ukraine democratic. It's wonderful that they're so dedicated because, when we came to Ukraine in 1994, many of them were afraid that the country would slip back into Stalinism.

*Q: And very cynical, I would imagine.*

AARNES: Yes, very cynical. It's remarkable that they stayed active in Ukraine's tough environment.

*Q: Great, thank you.*

*Q: So, it is September 13 and we are continuing the interview with Anne Aarnes. I'm going to turn it over to Anne and talk about what happened after Ukraine.*

AARNES: I left Ukraine in 1997 and went with my family to Bangladesh for three years as the AID deputy mission director. AID has had a long relationship with Bangladesh ever since it separated from Pakistan and became an independent country in 1971. The mission had been designated as a full sustainable development mission so there was a strong focus on development in a more traditional sense. Development was in fact a principal concern of the whole post, including the embassy. In 1997 the agency, including the Bangladesh mission, was in the throes of reengineering.

*Q: That was Al Gore's initiative, right? But it takes a while to get out to the field.*

AARNES: Reengineering had been a very strong agency initiative for a few years, but I hadn't had much exposure to it in Ukraine. The Ukraine mission had been given a pass on that initiative because it was a new mission and focusing on many other things. But Bangladesh had been designated one of the agency's lead missions for reengineering. Dick Brown, the mission director, was an enthusiastic supporter of reengineering, and reengineering processes were a frequent topic in mission meetings.

*Q: Do you know why?*

AARNES: Dick liked trying out new processes and approaches. He was interested in new ideas. He wanted very much to help the Bangladesh mission staff work better together, and reengineering seemed to him like an excellent idea because of its team-based approach to organization and operations.

I had always heard that AID's older, well-established missions often had difficulties with relationships between mission offices. For example, there might be a pattern of tensions between the program office and FM (the financial management staff), or between the contracts office and the technical offices, which would routinely lead to long delays in getting issues resolved and paperwork signed. In Bangladesh, Dick Brown saw

reengineering as a way to break some of those stalemates among mission offices. I think that, to a large extent, it worked, because people in the mission became excited about doing things a different way. Dick had established a more positive and productive working environment. In my opinion, he achieved this change in part through reengineering but also, and perhaps mostly, by exerting his own positive style and drive. But reengineering was also enormously time-consuming. It was all about process. The mission had already spent most of a year working to establish it. Fortunately, during that year, there were so many hartals in Bangladesh that the country was nearly at a standstill and hardly any work on USAID projects could get done outside the mission anyway.

*Q: Explain what a hartal is.*

AARNES: A hartal is a general strike in a South Asian country. It is usually called by an opposition political party or a protest group to protest some government policy or action. If a hartal is called for a certain day, then workplaces, businesses and shops are usually shut down. Nobody is supposed to be out on the streets; if they are, they risk being attacked by the enforcers. So, there can be big problems with security and with law and order. In 1996, there had been so many hartals that, apparently, the mission had had a lot of down time, when they couldn't work on the programs, so they put their attention on reengineering instead.

Overall, reengineering in USAID/Bangladesh had some positives. It had a long-term impact in breaking down some of the barriers between mission offices that had hurt the mission's program effectiveness for a decade or more. But the next mission director who came in, Gordon West, didn't see things quite that way.

*Q: So things reverted?*

AARNES: A bit. Gordon dispensed with a lot of the process and put much more focus on development achievements, to the immense relief of many mission staff. It was time to turn our attention back to development.

*Q: It strikes me that Bangladesh may be the only overseas posting you had that was truly a development program without a whole lot of political overlay.*

AARNES: That's right. It was the only one. After assignments to Pakistan and Ukraine, it was a real change to see in Bangladesh how U.S. interests and strategic approach were defined, and also the somewhat slower pace at the post and fewer contacts with Washington.

*Q: How was the mission's relationship with the embassy?*

AARNES: We had a good, close relationship with the embassy as colleagues and partners. A new embassy had been built about a decade before, with space for the AID mission, so we were in constant contact. The ambassador was always very interested in what we were doing and we invited him to speak at AID events whenever we could. We also worked closely with the embassy political and economic officers, and with USIS.

*Q: Did you spend a fair amount of time working with other donors?*

AARNES: Yes. The role of donors was very important because Bangladesh was a major priority in the global development field. There was a donor coordination group that the mission director and I attended. The U.S. ambassador and many other ambassadors often attended as well because economic and social development was one of the most important issues in Bangladesh. There were also active sub-groups for each sector. We all exchanged information and coordinated closely.

AID's program in those days was a reasonably good size, around \$75 to \$100 million total per year, including about \$45 to \$55 million in programs and the rest in food aid. The amount of food aid in a given year depended on the need during that year.

*Q: How much of the program was health or health and population?*

AARNES: It was the bulk of the program funds. Around 70 percent or more of program funds were for health and population, because Bangladesh absorbed so much of the agency's health/population earmark. The program was quite successful. In the late 1990s it was going through a tricky transition, shifting more responsibility for family planning services to the Bangladesh government so services wouldn't depend as heavily on NGO networks which couldn't take the effort much farther. Many of the services that AID had funded were to be incorporated within the government system. The government wanted to assume these responsibilities, but they didn't yet have the capacity to do it. There was a significant dip in contraceptive prevalence for a while as the government increased its capacity. But the program recovered and moved forward. In fact, the last time I was in Bangladesh, in 2014, the country was just reaching replacement level fertility, an extraordinary achievement.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: At the same time, there was an important trade-off with the success in the population and health sectors. Because of the earmark, the mission did not have funding to make substantial achievements in other sectors.

*Q: And was that a frustration to the mission?*

AARNES: Yes, it was particularly frustrating when the mission saw good opportunities for economic growth projects. Bangladesh was at a good point for moving forward and there were good opportunities for AID to help them make significant progress.

*Q: Right. So, were you able to find some workarounds?*

AARNES: There were small projects we could do, but basically it was nearly impossible to find as much as \$1 million to get them started.

*As I recall, there was a big flood in Bangladesh during the time you were there.*

AARNES: That's right. In the late summer and early fall of 1998, Bangladesh went

through its worst flood in a century. AID and the rest of the U.S. Government joined with other donors in providing help. We provided food aid and also helped set up clinics to make sure that people had immunizations and emergency health services and that supply networks worked. The U.S. played a key role.

But a major theme of the three years I was in Bangladesh was the harm that the country's political turmoil did to its efforts to create a more prosperous nation. The relationship between the two political parties was dreadful. While a number of development assistance programs trudged along and did useful work, there were many real opportunities that couldn't be taken and weren't being taken because the political system was so dysfunctional and the relationship between the leaders of the two major political parties was so poor.

*Q: Toxic, yes.*

AARNES: And that's still true. It had been the cause of the hartals the year before we came to post. The donors' group did send the prime minister a letter of concern about the damage that the political instability was doing to the country. It was leading to the breakdown of law and order and blocking the country from moving forward.

*Q: That was before you started seeing more Islamic fundamentalism, right? It was just good old-fashioned political conflict?*

AARNES: Yes, largely, although, following the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, there were security threats for a time. But overall, there wasn't a big threat of Islamic terrorism. For diplomats and development types, it was a good family post.

*Q: I remember you telling me that when your son got to college, when he was asked where he was from he said Bangladesh.*

AARNES: Of course. That's the only thing he could credibly say. My children liked it very much and they have kept some of those friendships.

*Q: To this day?*

AARNES: Yes, and Bangladesh was and still is a good development mission. You can see the impact of sustained development efforts over time, despite the frustrations.

*Q: Right. Well, that's from early on in the country's development history.*

AARNES: Absolutely. In Bangladesh, with the strength of its NGOs throughout the country and their willingness to try different approaches, a tremendous amount of progress was made. The Grameen Bank and BRAC, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, did an amazing amount of work.

*Q: And they are now both sort of global brands.*

AARNES: Yes. You can see the difference when you compare Bangladesh with other countries, like Pakistan, for example, where there have been stops and starts in AID assistance.

*Q: So, the program more or less seemed to thrive on benign neglect.* AARNES: From Washington.

*Q: From Washington.*

AARNES: Yes. Although in those days it wasn't called neglect. It was called normal. *Q: Right, exactly.*

AARNES: We did have email by that time but it wasn't the constant oversight and guiding of every penny and the oversight of every single activity, which now absorbs an enormous amount of the mission's time and effort, with the result that a lot of things that could happen don't.

*Q: I'm sure also that CODELS were rare.*

AARNES: Very rare. A staffer came to visit once and we treated him like the emperor. He was a nice guy, not a key staffer. The major VIP event was President Clinton's visit in March 2000. It was the very first, and so far only, visit to Bangladesh by an American president. He came over to Bangladesh for a day in the middle of an extended visit to India. A big part of his schedule was planned as a visit to a village to see programs being run by Grameen Bank, BRAC, and others. AID was in charge of the village visit, and I was specifically in charge of it for AID. At the very last minute, late at night, about 12 hours before the president's arrival, the village venue had to be changed because there was a credible threat. We shifted gears, and within a few hours transported busloads of village women to Dhaka, decorated the embassy atrium to look sort of like a village, and conducted the village visit there. The visit went very well. President Clinton had a good chance to see Grameen and BRAC and a number of other programs.

*Q: Probably set the stage for the Clinton Foundation interest in those pet programs.*

AARNES: Hillary Clinton had urged her husband to go to Bangladesh and see what Grameen was doing, because she had been there a few years earlier and had been impressed with the model. The Bangladeshis enjoyed the president's visit very much, and so did we.

*Q: Good. So, after Bangladesh, then-?*

AARNES: After Bangladesh, I was posted to Egypt from 2000 until 2003. My husband retired from AID in 2000, so he was officially my dependent. We were no longer classified as a tandem couple.

*Q: Egypt was a very different type of program.*

AARNES: Yeah, very different. I was the deputy mission director there as well, but it

was a very different experience. Everything about AID's assistance to Egypt was vastly larger than Bangladesh, although some of the basics were the same.

Egypt had been AID's largest program for 25 years and it focused on supporting U.S. foreign policy as well as helping Egypt progress. Operationally, it was a huge challenge. The AID program used just about every kind of implementation mechanism imaginable. In addition to AID's usual technical assistance contractors and grantees, the program included a big cash transfer with strong policy conditionality. There was a great deal of infrastructure construction and institution building. There was also a commodity import program (CIP), one of the last AID CIPs in the world, as well as a local currency program and endowments.

*Q: So, you probably learned some new programming mechanisms.*

AARNES: Yes. It was impressive to see how the appropriate mechanisms can be very effective in supporting a project to achieve its objectives.

It was a complex program. Egypt had been receiving \$815 million a year from AID for 25 years, as part of the Camp David Accords. In 2000, AID and the Government of Egypt had negotiated a glide path down to a lower funding level. It was planned that the annual funding level would shrink to half of what it had been, and then stabilize in 2009 at about \$400 million per year. So in 2000, the program was still enormous. Within AID and, I believe, in Congress, the common perception of AID's assistance to Egypt was that funding was shoveled in and stuffed into large projects that didn't accomplish much. But when I got to Egypt, I found out how carefully most of the programs were planned and managed. I also observed that the Egyptian government moves slowly. I had no idea how slowly a government could move.

*Q: Pharaonic pace.*

AARNES: Yes. The pace was slow and AID had found some good ways to use that time. The mission could do any pilot, they could do all of the preliminary studies needed. So the programs that resulted were thoroughly thought out and very solid. Some outside observers thought that the mission didn't know where there were serious problems, or were hiding the facts from outsiders. But actually, the mission did know what was happening in each project and they were open about it. They had all the data. They knew what was working and what wasn't working. And given the circumstances, I think that that was a very fine thing for them to be able to do.

*Q: Absolutely because in a sense you didn't have the leverage of not providing the funds, year after year. You had to use other mechanisms to try and keep the program sound.*

AARNES: Yes, that's right. In Egypt, as in all the countries I served in, there are many capable and committed people to work with. So, the pharaonic pace of the Egyptian government's bureaucracy was difficult, but our Egyptian counterparts could be a real pleasure to work with.



In fact, AID programs in Egypt had accomplished a tremendous amount in 25 years. They helped drastically reduce infant and maternal mortality, built sewage systems that dramatically improved sanitation, supplied clean water and electricity to nearly the entire population, built thousands of schools, most of which are still in use, and got the telephone system to work.

*Q: AID should be very proud of those achievements. And did you find, in general, a receptivity to Americans? Or was there sort of a disdain or an arrogance? Did AID's image still have the same clout it had say 20 years before?*

AARNES: I can't say what it had been like 20 years before, but the Egyptians that I met, at many different levels in different parts of the country, were friendly and welcoming, positive. I think disdain toward the U.S. may have developed a few years later.

I was in Cairo on 9/11. And one of the things that was notable was how many Egyptians, knowing that I was American, would come up just to say "I'm sorry." It was so sincere. There was a good, strong relationship, although tension increased over the Israeli Palestinian situation and US policies and actions concerning that.

*Q: Did something specific rev it up or was it just the same undercurrent that has been there for a long time?*

AARNES: The second Palestinian Intifada began about six weeks after I arrived, triggered by Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. Tensions rose over incidents in that conflict. Colin Powell came to visit several times. President Clinton had come in the fall of 2000, shortly before the U.S. presidential election. In late 2002 and early 2003, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, then there was a lot of tension.

*Q: I'm sure.*

AARNES: Among the donors, some countries were very much against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The U.S. quickly lost influence among these donors, beginning in the couple of months before the invasion. The loss of our power was tangible. Sitting in donor meetings, or in one-on-one conversations, I was aware of it. Other embassy colleagues told me they were experiencing the same thing. It happened immediately.

*Q: And that was largely because of this unpopular foreign policy?*

AARNES: Right.

*Q: I wonder, it was also during the time you were there when lots of different U.S. Government agencies were represented in Egypt and I know the ambassador in theory was in charge of coordinating all of them but it's kind of hard to do. And I just wonder, when you had so many different voices speaking for the U.S. Government, whether that also affected your ability to project power or authority.*

AARNES: Well, there were certainly a lot of other U.S. government agencies represented in Egypt. The ambassador made a big point of the fact that he expected everyone to

coordinate. It was very clear that we would be in deep trouble if we didn't work well together, all of us. But the fact is, and I saw this in Jordan as well, that while the Egyptians might have liked AID and the US in general, overall U.S. policy has a huge impact on what people in other countries think. And the start of the war in Iraq was an extremely strong action by the U.S. that very much reinforced people who didn't agree with the policy. So, I think it was not so much whether different U.S. agencies were working at cross purposes. The agencies did have somewhat different fields of interest, but I don't think we were working at cross purposes. More important than anything, I think, was what the president and the Congress were saying, and what the United States was doing.

*Q: Right. And would you sometimes be asked to explain it even though it was a pretty far remit from USAID's program?*

AARNES: Seldom, although it did happen occasionally. People would generally be aware that AID didn't formulate overall US foreign policy. When one of my Egyptian or donor colleagues wanted to talk about these issues at length, I could refer them to my embassy colleagues who dealt with these issues and were better able to respond to whoever was asking for information. But at the same time as there was a general understanding that AID doesn't make US foreign policy, our programs are intended to support that policy. At all times, we are representatives of the U.S. government in whatever country we're working, so U.S. policy has a big impact on our relationships.

In those years, AID was just beginning to make a push to increase outreach and communications efforts in all missions worldwide. In Egypt, we strengthened outreach and communications with more public speaking, appearances at events, and communications about AID's work with the Egyptian people. AID can often provide the best face of the United States, and many of the mission staff, including FSNs, enjoyed doing it and found it very satisfying.

*Q: Did you find that your staff was prepared and eager to do that? How did you handle it? Because I think traditionally AID hired people for their technical skills and not necessarily for their communication skills.*

AARNES: We did need to strengthen our communication skills. AID/W would give us a little training where they could, or materials or advice, but of course we needed more. It's not something that AID people are accustomed to, so it's a new skill. By contrast, for State Department officers, there is a focus on talking to different kinds of audiences, giving clear, simple briefings and explanations.

*Q: And USIA (United States Information Agency) when it existed.*

AARNES: Definitely. USIA, when it existed, was a wonderful communications resource. AID people weren't hired to communicate in a language that non-technical, non-AID, non-development people would understand, so putting things in English instead of development jargon was often a challenge. One of the ambassadors to Egypt, David Welch, would say, if he asked AID for a verbal explanation or a written document, "Give

it to me in BBC special English.” It was a good rule to keep in mind.

After 9/11 the Egypt mission and all other AID missions, but especially in the Middle East, looked again at mission program strategies in light of the changed U.S. foreign policy interests, and we refocused the program to be in line with the new security concerns. We looked particularly at specific audiences.

*Q: For example?*

AARNES: For example, we looked at data on young Egyptian men without jobs, and we explored what kinds of things needed to be done to strengthen education, help create jobs, and provide training in critical employable skills. We examined how AID could help Egypt build a competitive workforce with people who have skills for the modern economy. That’s an enormous problem in Egypt, as in many other countries. We greatly increased the mission’s focus on that issue.

*Q: So, which programs, basically, got cut back to change that focus? Or was there just so much money that you didn’t really have to curtail very much?*

AARNES: With Egypt’s large pipeline, there was enough flexibility to keep from doing damage to other programs.

*Q: That’s great.*

AARNES: The mission had long-term efforts which were critical for Egypt, such as work in water and sanitation. Those efforts needed to keep moving, along with newer activities to strengthen the education system and create jobs.

*Q: When the NGO law came into effect, it started to change the ability of U.S. and international NGOs to work on, say, democracy programming. Was that on your watch or later?*

AARNES: It came a bit later. The Egyptian government always had control over which NGOs they registered, though. At the time I was there, democracy was not something that could be talked about much. NDI (National Democratic Institute) and IRI (International Republican Institute) were not working in the country at that point. I think they came a little later in the Bush Administration.

One thing that was created during those times was MEPI, the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

*Q: Oh, yes. Talk a little bit about that.*

AARNES: MEPI was created and directed by a very high-profile deputy assistant secretary (DAS) for State’s Near East Affairs Bureau: Liz Cheney, the daughter of Vice President Cheney. MEPI was interested in the mission in Egypt because Egypt was the biggest U.S. Government assistance program in the region. The MEPI staff were feeling their way, figuring out what exactly the MEPI program would do. Their assumption

seemed to be that all U.S. assistance programs must conform to the aims of the MEPI program. The DAS and her staff undertook an exhaustive review of AID's Egypt program. By that time, the program was 27 years old and had had a steady input of \$815 million dollars a year for most of that time. It was immense, and MEPI staff were determined to delve into every bit of it. These were not people who had had much exposure to development programs so it was especially hard for them. It took a long, long time.

*Q: A lot of the mission staff time, too, I imagine.*

AARNES: An extraordinary amount of mission staff time. I concluded that it was fortunate that the MEPI staff focused on Egypt, because there wasn't any other mission in the world at that point that I could imagine surviving so many demands. We had a big enough mission staff that we could kind of cope with all the demands. At MEPI's request, we sent them thousands of pages of documents and had frequent teleconferences between MEPI staff and many of the mission's staff. The MEPI staff were working to get control of AID's Egypt program, but they didn't have experience dealing with the substance of programs or operations and so, for example, they called a halt to all new procurements.

*Q: And they had the authority to do that?*

AARNES: Well, possibly not, but nobody wanted to test it. So the mission worked out how to manage it. I was acting director by that time because the director had gone on to another assignment. MEPI staff had not specified whether they intended to halt only new procurements, or whether they wanted to stop incremental funding for on-going activities as well. So we decided in the mission to put a hold only on new procurements. We looked through every scheduled procurement and decided whether it was new, or an extension, or a follow-on, or its funding was just a part of the funding that had already been approved and so forth. We could not have the mission come to a halt just because of the inexperience of the MEPI staff. It would be a catastrophe for MEPI as well as for the mission's programs, but MEPI wouldn't have realized it until afterwards.

The Egypt mission had had a problem with MEPI a few months earlier. At the end of the fiscal year in 2002, funding for Egypt had gotten stuck in the State Department for weeks because it hadn't been cleared by Liz Cheney's staff. It wasn't released to the mission until the 26<sup>th</sup> of September.

*Q: Oh my gosh, so you had four days to get everything negotiated and signed by both the Egyptian government and the AID mission.*

AARNES: Right. The mission staff had alerted all their government counterparts ahead of time, and they negotiated like mad and got a lot of it signed. On the last night, there was still \$200 million worth of project funding to go. We invited our Ministry of Planning counterparts to the mission, sent out for Chinese food, and negotiated all night. I was the acting mission director at that time, so I stayed there and gave the final signatures

as each one was finished. We got it all done before dawn.

*Q: Wow. Amazing. Was it hard, negotiating, or was the Ministry of Planning trying to be as helpful as possible?*

AARNES: We knew the ministry staff well and had a good working relationship with them, but there were some tricky parts in a couple of projects, and there hadn't been time to work them out after the funds arrived at post. We had to give our ministry counterparts our word that we would fix these things and would negotiate them fully.

*Q: And they trusted you?*

AARNES: They did, and we did not take that for granted. We worked with our ministry colleagues after the new fiscal year started, to smooth out all the wrinkles in the program.

*Q: Was the hold up in the State Department because of MEPI or who knows?*

AARNES: The clearance was held up in MEPI. I think they just hadn't quite realized the urgency, although their colleagues in both State and AID had been trying to explain it.

*Q: Right, that September 30 was a real date?*

AARNES: Exactly. Anyway, all the funds were signed up in time to avoid what would have been a great embarrassment for the U.S. As we all know, strategy is essential, but then all the way down to the ground, if you don't sign up the money, you don't have a program. So, it was very lucky that we pulled it out.

*Q: Yes. Wow.*

AARNES: In Egypt, the embassy had a lot of involvement in what AID did, and their involvement was an important additional step in the mission's program decisions. Ambassador Dan Kurtzer was the ambassador for the first year I was in Egypt. He had a strong interest in the AID program, particularly in the democracy and governance activities. We had bi-weekly meetings on the democracy/governance program with him and the political section staff.

*Q: Was he interested in the Muslim Brotherhood, or did he have more of a rule of law kind of focus? It wasn't political parties, necessarily?*

AARNES: No, it wasn't political parties necessarily. AID was mainly funding projects with local NGOs and helping to strengthen the court system. But Ambassador Kurtzer had instituted much closer and more regular meetings than there had been before between the embassy and AID.

*Q: And did that create any friction?*

AARNES: Well, I'd like to say that any U.S. ambassador in Egypt is imposing enough so there is no such thing as friction.

*Q: Got it. Kind of how high do I go.*

AARNES: Ambassador Kurtzer is a brilliant man. What we in the AID mission had to do was be completely prepared. When we weren't prepared, it could be a catastrophe. And we also had very good working relationships with the embassy sections, particularly the political/economic section. The working relationships between the mission's democracy/governance officers and the embassy political officers were especially close.

*Q: So, it seems to me it was such a long-standing program and you had lots and lots of excellent FSN staff, so I wonder to what extent the FSN staff might have not wanted to change things? I mean, to what extent were they sort of set on doing things the way they had been done or, alternatively, were they ready to move to a more security-focused program? What was the relationship with the FSNs?*

AARNES: Many of the FSNs in the AID mission were extremely impressive. In fact, both Ambassador Kurtzer and Ambassador Welch told me how impressive AID's FSNs were. It's hard to say how committed the mission's FSNs were, as a group, to continuing the programs they had been working on and preventing change. It would probably be similar to the U.S. staff in Washington, or anywhere else, really, who become committed to certain programs just the way they are and want to see them through to success. When I was in Egypt, the mission was already on a track to finish some programs, so emphasizing other areas post 9/11 wasn't an abrupt change in direction. My impression was that the AID FSNs were pleased that Egypt would be part of AID's new strategic planning, and that the new program emphases addressed some of Egypt's key development problems.

*Q: And people understood that?*

AARNES: Generally, yes. Although when I visited the mission about six years later, there were tensions with some FSNs who were seeing their programs finally come to an end. But during the years I was there, the planned gradual reduction in staff was occurring through normal attrition, without serious tensions.

*Q: Well, that's interesting. It's just that in the missions you have sort of the permanent staff which are the FSNs and then you have a rotating group of American senior staff. And there could be conflict when the mission has to make big changes.*

AARNES: As I recall, during the time I was in Egypt, there wasn't much conflict over these issues. In part, it was probably because the program changes and the decline in program funding were planned to be very gradual. In part, also, the absence of serious conflict might have been because the AID mission director, Bill Pearson, and I were already well established at post before 9/11 occurred and the agency began to focus more on security issues. So we were in a better position to discuss the new issues and program shifts with the whole mission as a team. A couple of years later, I understand that the tensions increased a great deal. The mission programs were being cut back much more than planned, with some strong political pressures, and Egypt's relationship with the U.S.

was more strained.

*Q: Interesting.*

AARNES: The conflict in the mission during the last 18 months I was there came from the issue of Iraq. A number of FSNs were extremely upset that the U.S. was preparing to go to war in Iraq.

*Q: Right. Did any resign?*

AARNES: Not as far as I know, not when I was posted there.

*Q: Right. How did you handle that? I mean, you personally. Because I'm sure they must have tried to draw you out on how you felt about it.*

AARNES: Yes. I was also the acting mission director in early 2003 because the director had moved to his next assignment, as the agency Counselor. For me, it was essential to keep talking to all the groups, to be present.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: We went through a lot of ups and downs at that mission. I tried to be available to talk to the staff and listen to their concerns. I didn't get into explaining U.S. policy or how I felt about it, or arguing about it with anyone. I said, "This is what AID is doing in Egypt, and this is our role. The AID mission in Egypt does not have a role in the Iraq war. But here are our goals to help Egypt." I said that I understood that there was a great deal of interest and many different opinions about what was happening in Iraq, but the goals and programs in our own mission hadn't changed. Those were the conversations we had in the mission in the first few months of 2003, leading up to the beginning of the war. The mission staff seemed to respect that, although it certainly didn't turn them into supporters of U.S. policy toward Iraq. And when I have heard about the Egypt mission over the years since then, it seems, not surprisingly, that those concerns have continued.

*Q: Yes. I'm sure that's right. Okay. On to Jordan.*

AARNES: I went to Jordan in late March of 2003 as the AID mission director and stayed there until 2007. I arrived at a particularly difficult period for the embassy community and the AID mission. The Iraq war had begun just days before, dependents had been evacuated from Jordan, and there were constant security threats. The AID mission had been decimated. It was a very small mission in any case, for the size of the program. When I got there, six of the mission's 12 U.S. direct hire positions were vacant. The executive officer, Larry Foley, had been assassinated by Al-Qaeda at the end of October 2002, five months earlier, and other U.S. employees had curtailed in the months after that, some finding that the stress and grief were more than they could stand. The AID mission director had been reassigned to another post sooner than expected and I had

come in to take her place, so it was an abrupt change for the mission. The mission, both U.S. and FSN staff, was traumatized by the events of the past few months. It was a small mission at that point, about 75 people in all, a very close team.

*Q: So, the assassination really took a toll. And the ongoing war probably also?*

AARNES: Both the assassination and the war took a toll on the mission. The war was deeply unpopular in Jordan and that led to some of the tension. There was a very dark and sad mood in the mission which did not lift until the first year was over after the assassination. Things got better gradually, but it took a long time.

Staffing the mission up was a priority for the first couple of years. Because AID's funding for Jordan had increased significantly in the past six years, by 2003 the mission staff was too small to be able to manage and be accountable for all the projects. It was another instance of the staff size of a mission lagging several years behind the growth of the program.

*Q: What was the nature of the program when you arrived?*

AARNES: Jordan is a crucial ally of the United States in the Middle East, so the AID program has been closely aligned with U.S. foreign policy interests. Since the early 2000s, the program had been tightly focused on three sectors: water, economic growth, and health and population. In 2003, in line with AID's interest post-9/11 to address the roots of extremism, the mission was in the process of adding a program in the education sector. We added a democracy and governance program in the year after that. Those five sectors are important development sectors for Jordan's prosperity in the future. But in addition, progress in those sectors could help maintain stability in the country and provide services to people that they desperately needed.

*Q: Right. Well, that was also a time when you were seeing many Iraqi refugees coming into Jordan. So that was creating other issues. Isn't that right?*

AARNES: Yes it is. The Iraqi refugees who came into Jordan created huge pressure on the country. Jordan is a small country, with a population before the war of less than five-and-a-half million. Estimates of the number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan vary, but there were probably 700-800,000. The refugees who had resources rented or bought housing and drove their cars on the roads. Jordan allowed the refugees to go to Jordanian schools and health facilities. The infrastructure in Amman, where most of them were crowded, was badly stressed, and rising prices caused hardship for many Jordanians. Of course, in recent years the influx of Syrian refugees has caused even more stress. The AID program in Jordan was big compared with many AID programs. When I arrived in 2003, the annual budget was about \$250 million and about half of that was a policy-conditioned cash transfer. On top of that, in 2003, the U.S. gave Jordan another \$700 million.

*Q: For military aid?*



AARNES: No, it was reimbursement for the expenses that Jordan incurred in providing support for the war.

*Q: You didn't have to program that, though?*

AARNES: No, but the mission's very small program and financial management staffs had to do all the work on transferring funds, because it was a cash transfer and it went through the AID mission.

*Q: Were you able to recruit new staff?*

AARNES: We were. With help from the Asia-Near East Bureau in AID/W, we got some excellent staff. Six more direct-hire Foreign Service officers arrived in Jordan within the next six months, which doubled the size of the U.S. staff. And we were able to recruit more staff, both American and Jordanian, as time went on. In fact, the total Jordan mission staff almost tripled during the four years I was there. Jordan developed a reputation as a post with high morale and performance. We all had to deal with serious security threats as well as unsettling changes as the mission grew. The senior staff all worked to keep an open atmosphere and be honest and straightforward about what was happening. The mission staff was proud of what they were doing. The program was focused on things that made a big difference in helping the people of Jordan. It was an intense time, but it was also a good time for the mission. We worked to stay flexible, too, because the profile of the mission rose even further in Washington. There was an endless stream of CODELs and other VIPs coming to visit Jordan throughout the next year.

*Q: I'm sure. How did you manage?*

AARNES: Well, it was a difficult problem but not unique in the agency. We knew that the visitors needed to get clear information about what the AID program was doing and why it was important. And I certainly learned, in every post, that when VIPs saw projects in the field, it often made a tremendous difference in their understanding and support for AID programs. So in Jordan, at that critical time, we were fully aware of the need for members of Congress and their staffs, as well as other VIPs, to receive a good briefing and then if possible to see our work on the ground, and we did everything we could to facilitate that. And we had so many visitors. Usually we kept things straight, but I remember showing up once in the SCIF for a VIP briefing. I had arrived a few minutes early, and the defense attaché was the only other person there. We quickly realized that neither of us had any idea who the VIP was whom we were about to brief; there were so many visitors that we couldn't remember.

But in the AID mission, in general, we managed because the mission staff, both US and FSNs, were a superb team. We developed systems for organizing the visits and preparing the briefing papers, agendas, and itineraries, and taking care of the logistics. Also, our Jordanian counterparts, both government and private sector, were tremendously helpful.

We were all on the same page in presenting how the U.S. and Jordan were working together on key development issues.

*Q: Right. And the relationship with the embassy staff, good?*

AARNES: It was very good.

*Q: You were in the same building, right?*

AARNES: Right. Relations between the AID mission and the embassy had traditionally been good over the years. There were two ambassadors during the time I was there, Edward (Skip) Gnehm and David Hale. They were both exceptionally good ambassadors, and Amb. Gnehm was one of the State Department's most senior officers at that time. They needed and expected to be kept well informed about what was happening in the AID program. It was an ESF (Economic Support Funds) program in a highly strategic country, and the embassy and AID were working with many of the same people in Jordan. The AID mission staff worked hard to make sure we were coordinating with the embassy econ section, political section, and public affairs. We had generally close collegial relationships with the embassy. Overall, interagency relations worked better in Jordan than in some other countries, probably for several reasons. One was that the U.S. mission in Jordan was still relatively small, so it was easy for everyone from different agencies to know each other. But a major reason was that the ambassadors set a standard of respecting the work of all agencies and insisting that inter-agency relationships at every level be respectful and collaborative. It made for a very constructive environment. From the AID side, we needed the close embassy relationship to be informed about U.S. strategic interests that were involved in issues we were working on, and with the collegiality and mutual respect, we could provide our best judgment on how AID could help most effectively to support those interests while still pursuing long-term development goals.

*Q: In some cases it's not only where you're going but they want to direct you in how to get there.*

AARNES: That's when the relationship doesn't work very well. That problem didn't happen in Jordan, though. Both Ambassador Gnehm and Ambassador Hale understood that AID had the expertise and experience to make a judgment about the best ways to support long-term foreign policy objectives as well as, when necessary, to help when short-term crises arise. We consulted with our embassy colleagues frequently, of course.

*Q: Right, right.*

AARNES: Also, the donor-host country relationship in Jordan was the best real partnership that I witnessed in any country I served in. The king was committed to economic liberalization, and the key ministers that we worked with, as well as key colleagues in the private sector and NGOs, were exceptionally bright, innovative and

committed. As often as not, in the sectors we worked on together, they were leading the way on the programs and introducing ideas for new approaches. A number of them remarked that they trusted AID to be working with them in their best interests and they trusted that we would provide them with the highest quality help that we could. I remember one very senior colleague saying in a large group – it was something that I’m particularly pleased to remember – that we always provided them with the skills that they needed, the confidence that they could succeed, and the ownership so that they could do things themselves.

*Q: That sounds like a good formula for what AID is trying to do. Okay. Then where did you go after you left Jordan?*

AARNES: I left Jordan in May of 2007 and I arrived in Pakistan in June as the mission director. Pakistan was designated a CPC, Critical Priority Country, for AID and it is vital to U.S. strategic interests. It’s a nuclear power, it’s right next to Afghanistan, and its relationship with the U.S. is necessary for the U.S. to be able to continue to carry out operations in Afghanistan.

*Q: But it had been 14 years since you’d been posted there, right?*

AARNES: Right. It was a challenging time to come back. The country was spiraling down. There were constant security threats and security incidents. There were constant crises in the government, and political and economic instability were growing. An extremist insurgency was spreading across the country from the FATA, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In the U.S., there was intense Congressional interest in what was going on in Pakistan. But U.S. policy and strategic directions for Pakistan were not clear, and Pakistan did not receive high-level U.S. attention on a sustained and regular basis for almost two more years. The attention Pakistan did receive was intermittent and there would be abrupt changes in direction.

*Q: And was that related to changing personnel back in Washington or something else?*

AARNES: It was the last 18 months of the Bush II administration when I arrived, so that may have caused some of the lack of attention to Pakistan. But there wasn’t really a focus on Pakistan in Washington. It was designated as a CPC, but Washington’s attention was on Afghanistan. The communication and dialogue mechanisms that were set up between Washington and Afghanistan and the necessary staff resources didn’t exist for Pakistan. So, for example, questions that the post raised about Pakistan matters would just hang there and go unanswered. The situation was incredibly difficult for the post.

*Q: Did you try to use AID Washington to extract those answers and they couldn’t get them either?*

AARNES: In AID/Washington, also, there was very little focus on how to support Pakistan. AID mirrored the State Department in these matters. I worked with the

leadership of the Asia/Near East Bureau in AID and got support sometimes to increase staff by a few positions at a time, but there was no coherent and sustained attention. One clear signal of AID/Washington's lack of focus on Pakistan was that there was only one person on the Pakistan desk, and he was not senior. He was skillful and trustworthy, a very good officer, but he did not yet have the experience or clout to engage at high levels. That started to shift gradually after nearly a year, when a second person joined the desk.

*Q: Interesting.*

AARNES: Yes. In the mission, the staff was astonishingly small and the US staff was astonishingly junior.

*Q: U.S. staff?*

AARNES: U.S. staff. Many were DLIs (Development Leadership Initiative), new junior Foreign Service officers on their first tour.

*Q: Wow.*

AARNES: Later on in the time I was in Pakistan I said I would not take any DLIs on their first tour because it was not fair to the mission, and especially not fair to them.

*Q: Right. They're not getting the training.*

AARNES: Yes, so they couldn't quite keep up with the jobs. They were talented people, but they didn't have the experience to cope with the situation in Pakistan. Shortly after the agency decided not to place first-tour officers in CPCs anymore.

I'm sure those placements of new, untrained officers in CPCs had been made because the sudden requirements for staffing CPCs were overwhelming, far more than the agency could fill through the usual means.

*Q: Yes, that's who they had.*

AARNES: In 2007, the AID mission in Pakistan had 10 U.S. direct hire staff. We didn't have very many FSNs either because the mission was still relatively new. The U.S. Government had cut off economic and military assistance to Pakistan in the mid '90s because of Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons. So AID had to begin again from scratch in late 2002 and had kept the program and staff small. When I arrived in 2007, staff numbers were still very low, but the program was starting to explode. The staff was crammed into a tiny building near the embassy mailroom and the cafeteria. When the ambassador, Anne Patterson, visited the mission, she described the space as "miserable".

*Q: Miserable?*

AARNES: Yes. It was a perfect description, and I appreciated the ambassador's immediate recognition of that reality. The intense crowding made it extraordinarily difficult to work. But that year the OYB (Operating Year Budget) was \$489 million and there were these 10 mostly first tour officers who were responsible for making it all happen.

*Q: Wow.*

AARNES: We still got a great deal done. But I certainly spent a lot of time on staffing there.

*Q: I'll bet, I'll bet. And doing some on the spot training I imagine.*

AARNES: Oh yes. But we were stretched far too thin to provide proper training and mentoring. And in the CPCs with one-year tours, the turnover is so fast that people who come to the country without knowing anything about it are never going to learn because they don't have time and, because of security concerns, they can't get out and learn about the country and meet people.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: I think by this time we all know that about CPCs. And with any start-up mission, when you're starting up with no space, no system, and no people, there's no carryover from year to year. We know this, but it's still tough to experience it.

*Q: Was there absolutely no give for getting people to stay for two years?*

AARNES: Nearly everybody was encouraged to stay for two years. Some people did and that worked much better for both the program and the operations. But CPCs are particularly difficult places, and especially for officers who have families, because dependent children and non-working spouses are not allowed to accompany the officer. My husband came with me to Pakistan in 2007 as a dependent spouse and got a job as an EFM (Eligible Family Member) in the embassy. But for people who had children, being away from their families is a huge sacrifice and stress on families over the course of a year. Making the CPC tours longer than one year has been discussed, but it's really difficult.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: In Pakistan, the work was significantly different from work in other countries. AID hadn't done that kind of thing very often before, so everyone in Washington and in the field was learning how to cope and there weren't systems to manage it. It was sort of disorienting for AID staff to come to a post where, at least in the first few years, the working environment could be chaotic and without clear guidelines, the schedule for getting new projects on the ground was often totally unrealistic, and there often wasn't

time to work technical and implementation issues through thoroughly before a project was signed. On top of that, the staff's work was mostly confined to a desk in the mission in a heavily-guarded embassy in the capital city. There were fewer and fewer opportunities of the kind most development officers thrive on and thought they joined AID for, to get out to the field and get a sense of the country and of what works best.

*Q: There are so many reasons that people couldn't stay or wouldn't stay longer than one year. Was there any thinking about other ways to manage a program like that in a high threat situation?*

AARNES: Over time, I think the agency has learned a lot and gotten better at managing these situations, but the same problems are nearly inevitable every time. In those first years I think USAID as an agency didn't fully understand the chaotic and dangerous reality. AID has worked over the last decade on ways of dealing with the high-threat situation. For example, in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the missions created regional offices around each country so that the staff in these offices could be closer to the work on the ground and better able to operate and monitor programs.

Sometimes, families have been allowed to safe-haven in neighboring countries. That reduces the separation problems somewhat and might make it more likely for staff to agree to stay longer in a CPC assignment.

Improving the physical office space makes a great difference in how people feel about their work and what they are able to accomplish. The AID staff in Pakistan was in those miserable quarters for more than four years. After I left Pakistan, the mission moved into temporary buildings on the compound, and then, a few years later, into good permanent space. So the outcome was good, after more than a decade of poor working conditions.

*Q: We talked about initially it was almost impossible to get guidance from Washington.*

AARNES: Or it would change and flip.

*Q: So, I think probably it's getting this dissonance, different messages coming from different places that you had to basically manage, right?*

AARNES: Some dissonance existed, certainly. Washington as a whole was so absorbed in Afghanistan that Pakistan's issues weren't dealt with promptly or thoroughly. When the post raised an issue, there could often be delays in getting any response at all, or the post had to follow up so often to try to get a response that time ran out and the issue was dropped. The ambassador succeeded in establishing regular interagency SVTCs (secure video teleconference) with Washington in which all agencies had to come together to discuss and decide on Pakistan issues. Those SVTCs helped focus attention on critical issues and develop a coordinated response. In the AID mission, given the shifting environment in both Pakistan and Washington, we simply proceeded on our own to establish a strategic framework for the priority sectors that AID would engage in, design

new programs in line with the likely budget and priorities, and forge ahead.

*Q: Did you get any more help from AID/Washington?*

AARNES: Yes, the Asia/Near East Bureau put more staff on the Pakistan desk. At the end of 2008, AID/Washington established a separate Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs (OAPA) that reported directly to the Administrator. OAPA provided considerably more resources to support the Pakistan mission, both programmatically and administratively. After President Obama's inauguration in 2009, Richard Holbrooke, who had been appointed the president's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, took control of the Pakistan AID program, down to the last detail.

The environment in Pakistan became more and more difficult during the two years I was there. The insurgency was spreading and the country was in a state of political upheaval. In July 2007, the Pakistan government's attempt to clear terrorists out of the Red Mosque in Islamabad caused a political crisis and further weakened President Musharraf's government. Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007 was followed by Musharraf's defeat in nationwide elections. Security continued to deteriorate. The Marriott Hotel in Islamabad was blown up in September 2008, and an AID contractor Chief of Party and his driver were assassinated in Peshawar in November 2008.

*Q: So, in the incredibly difficult setting, what are you most proud of?*

AARNES: One of the things I'm proud of is that the AID staff in Pakistan built a much stronger program and mission. In a profoundly unstable environment, a coherent framework and programs were created that addressed some of the most fundamental problems in Pakistan. They focused on things that the Pakistani people wanted and that were essential to enable the country to move forward. Health and education were two of the key sectors, as well as economic growth, democracy and governance, and energy. In Pakistan's chaotic environment, when things were changing all the time, that framework enabled us to work in areas that made sense, while staying flexible.

*Q: That was essential, and it's important to appreciate what goes into getting an AID program going. Were there program successes you were particularly proud of?*

AARNES: A major success for AID was our assistance in reconstruction in areas that had been decimated by the massive earthquake in October 2005. The earthquake, in the northern areas in Pakistan, had killed around 85,000 people. The U.S. disaster assistance response had been extraordinary. When I first visited the area in 2007, two years after the earthquake, the local people were still talking about the wonderful sight of the Chinook helicopters, and how enormously helpful and sympathetic U.S. military and disaster assistance workers (AID's DART teams) had been. After the initial relief phase was completed, the AID mission set up a four-year \$200 million program to work in those areas to rebuild health facilities and schools, to help improve livestock and small business management, and to train people to get their education and health systems working well.

The programs were excellent, and AID had very strong ties with the local governments and the local populations. AID staff were able to visit the northern areas at that point, and I saw the evidence every time I was there. The towns and project sites would put out big banners that said “Welcome USAID”. Nobody else in Pakistan was putting up public banners saying “Welcome USAID” at that time, so their gratitude and their warm welcome were especially notable. There was great value for the U.S. of having programs like that and having them last over a few years. Local officials in these areas told me that many donors had made commitments, but a lot of them had left Pakistan without fulfilling their pledges. The U.S. was one of the last and biggest donors there. Bob Macleod gave superb leadership to the program for the AID mission from start to finish. The program was completed in 2010, just as it had been planned with the local people.

*Q: That was a great achievement for AID.*

AARNES: Yes, it was. Another thing I’m proud of is how AID’s quick response, skill, and professionalism helped the U.S. and Pakistan pull through some extremely tricky spots. One example occurred in early 2008, as Pakistan prepared for and conducted parliamentary elections. There was extraordinary tension surrounding the elections. President Musharraf, who had taken over the government in 1999, had been slipping out of power since early in 2007. Benazir Bhutto, the leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, had been the main hope for democracy in the country. But as she was campaigning at the end of December 2007, she was assassinated during a rally in Rawalpindi. Whenever Pakistan has elections, the security situation around the country is dicey and there is often violence. But this time, there was an absolute explosion of grief and rage.

*Q: So, you were curfewed?*

AARNES: In Islamabad, not for long, but the level of tension all over the country was sky high. The U.S. had pinned its hopes on having Pakistan elect a moderate democratic candidate. But after Benazir was killed, the U.S. wanted to demonstrate that we were supporting a free and fair election. IRI (International Republican Institute) had been working for some time, funded by AID, to lead the independent election observer team. Then, two weeks before the election, IRI pulled out because they said the security concerns were too great. So, in the next three or four days, AID worked to find another credible organization that was qualified to receive the funds and that was willing to take on the work immediately. And they did it and pulled it off.

*Q: Wow. How did you find another one?*

AARNES: It was an agency-wide response. We in the mission worked closely with AID/Washington, which had global contracts and grants that they could mobilize quickly. The problem was that there were very few organizations that were willing to consider taking the job. We were asking them to do something that was extremely risky, on an absurdly short deadline. AID/Washington, working with the mission, identified an organization that was willing and qualified, although not well-known, and we got the



grant negotiated and signed immediately. IRI then worked with the new grantee to pass over the information and arrangements that they had up to that point.

*Q: And they did it. Was the ambassador pleased?*

AARNES: Yes. She said the quick action had saved U.S. foreign policy. Anne Patterson was one of State's top ambassadors, so that was especially high praise.

*Q: There you go. You should be proud of that.*

AARNES: I was very proud of it, and especially proud of AID's skill in working as a team, both in the field and in Washington, to put complex things together in a crisis and then carry through to completion. That's AID at its best.

There were other AID activities that were making substantial contributions as well. A critical new program going early in 2007, in coordination with AID/W's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) that worked in the FATA and other unstable areas. It introduced activities at the community level that directly helped the local populations address dire problems and rebuild their communities after conflict. That program continued for years.

The mission's programs in other sectors were doing very well too. For example, a health sector activity trained health workers in poor areas to improve services for childbirth, in order to lower the high infant and maternal mortality rates in these areas. The mission's economic growth program had done some excellent work in encouraging small business development. The education program was developing major new efforts to improve teachers' skills and build schools, which were desperately needed. We also initiated conversations with the Minister of Energy about his interest in having U.S. technical assistance in the sector.

*Q: I've got to ask you about corruption and how you dealt with it. Did you see it? Were the inspector generals all over the place at that time?*

AARNES: At that time the inspectors weren't yet stationed in Pakistan. The array of inspection entities that were set up in Afghanistan, with some covering Pakistan as well, didn't exist yet. There were a few audits when I was there, but those were managed out of the regional inspector general's office in Manila.

The mission set up some training for the Pakistan government's Supreme Audit Institution, at their request, so that they would understand better how AID was overseeing our projects, and they would be able to do a better job on their audits. The mission had very strong FSN staff in the Financial Management office. We also had a talented controller, Clinton White, who came in the second year I was there, and Kris Smathers, a very strong senior controller, came after that. The team set up the training program, which was very useful for the Pakistan Government. It's a huge challenge to be

accountable for AID funding in a highly unstable environment.

*Q: Right, right, absolutely. That much money, few staff, difficulty traveling.*

AARNES: For our work in the FATA, an extremely dangerous area, the Pakistan mission developed a way of monitoring AID-funded activities despite our inability to travel there in person to see what was happening on the ground. The system for gathering information on how AID activities were doing entailed getting reports from a range of different sources, for example, from contractors who were working there; FSNs, when they were able to travel in the FATA, aerial photos; people in the communities when there was a chance to talk with them. Information from these different sources could give a better idea of what was happening and what the needs were, what was working and what wasn't. This was a very important development. The Afghanistan mission also developed and perfected a similar "tiered" system.

But my conclusion, after my experience in Pakistan and some observations from Iraq, is that it's unrealistic for AID to be held to the same standards of accountability in these conflict environments as they are in environments that are free of conflict.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: Even the most experienced people can be discouraged from working in dangerous and unstable places if they're at risk of being held accountable to standards that are unrealistic in such extraordinarily difficult situations. It doesn't make sense that the same standards would be required in circumstances where it's not possible to enforce them and still conduct assistance programs that are vital to U.S. policy objectives.

*Q: Right. But people have said the expectation that development can be a zero-risk enterprise is unrealistic even in the best settings.*

AARNES: Yes, it's absurd. Development carries risks by definition, and working in unstable environments is far riskier, but it's a U.S. foreign policy imperative. The programs and support systems, including audit systems, need to be reworked to be fully useful there. I understand that the tiered monitoring system I mentioned that's used in both Afghanistan and Pakistan has helped AID respond to auditors' skepticism about program activities and progress.

*Q: Yes. So, did you come away feeling discouraged about Pakistan?*

AARNES: Well, we could see that a number of programs were working well, and that was encouraging. It was clear that there were significant problems as well as significant opportunities. It was also clear overall that the frequently shifting political situation within Pakistan as well as Pakistan's complex relationship with the U.S. meant that achieving big changes in development sectors would be a long haul. But what was most discouraging to me at that point was the bureaucratic issues within the U.S. government.

*Q: Talk about some of those issues.*

AARNES: Many AID programs in politically strategic countries are funded with ESF (Economic Support Funds). ESF is supposed to be controlled by the State Department but implemented by AID. But in Pakistan, State asserted control over budget and project decisions as well. That caused friction and some dysfunction, and there were some very difficult years. For the next three years or so, there was extremely close operational management of AID by embassy officers.

*Q: Who did not have a development background or even a program management background?*

AARNES: Right, not at the level at which they became involved. It became very difficult, and programs slowed down or in some cases stopped completely. Some of the activities that were badly delayed weren't fully understood by State overseers. There wasn't a collaborative and mutually respectful relationship between embassy staff and AID staff.

*Q: Was that systemic, do you think, or due to personalities? Or both?*

AARNES: I've seen it often enough that I think it was becoming systemic. It's crucial to have strong leadership on this issue by embassy management and by State's bureau leadership in Washington. I understand that State and AID both concluded after a few years that the relationship was destructive, and they worked to improve it in Washington as well as at post.

*Q: Good. And do you think the mistrust and disrespect went both ways or do you think it was mainly State Department?*

AARNES: The mistrust went both ways, but my impression was that the disrespect was significantly stronger by State officers toward AID. There was not a problem at the higher levels when I was there, but the problem was present at lower levels. Some embassy officers treated AID mission staff dismissively. I understand that this treatment became worse in the next few years. The conflict between the AID mission director and State's inter-agency assistance coordinator in one of those years is probably what prompted the new ambassador to set firm expectations for a constructive, collaborative relationship between the embassy and the mission.

At the same time, AID staff needed coaching to understand the embassy's role too. In every post I was in, the AID mission leadership worked hard to develop constructive relationships with the embassy. This has been even more important in the last ten to fifteen years, when a large proportion of AID officers are new to the agency.

Relationships between AID missions and embassies often require a lot of work because

we have different, but usually complementary, objectives. We also come from different cultures.

*Q: Yes. So, as you've talked about your Foreign Service assignments, it does strike me that all but one of the overseas posts you had were in Islamic majority countries, and I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you to talk about what it was like to represent the U.S.*

*Government as a woman in countries that, while they may have a very sophisticated, small elite of very progressive women, in general this is not a place where women have thrived. So, I think it would be very useful to reflect on that. Can you say something about a woman serving in senior positions in Islamic countries? Any generalizations?*

AARNES: In senior positions or any positions?

*Q: Any positions. But in senior positions you're negotiating with counterparts at a fairly senior level, I assume.*

AARNES: Yes. Overall, I was almost always conscious of being a woman in an Islamic country. I was always adjusting my behavior around that fact. The condition of women in each country was always on my mind. This was particularly the case in Pakistan, which was the most conservative Islamic country I served in. It was impossible not to observe, all the time, that there were far fewer women than men seen in public, that many of them covered their faces partly or completely, that they were rarely in positions of influence or power. The Pakistani newspapers often carried accounts of horrific things that had happened to women. Those accounts were always hard to process, but they did make the importance of development work even clearer.

So for myself, when I was in my professional role I found it quite possible to carry out my professional responsibilities in the four Islamic countries I was assigned to in the Foreign Service. Of course, as a white person I was quickly identified as a foreigner, which possibly affected how I was treated. But the key, I think, was that I was an American and I was working for the U.S. government, attached to AID and the U.S. Embassy.

When I went to Pakistan in 1988, my first Foreign Service post, I found that the people at the top levels in government and the private sector were often very sophisticated. Every now and then there would be some kind of issue, but by and large it was not a problem. That was generally true of senior officials, and many officials at other levels as well, in other countries where I served.

Being in a senior position in any country is much more protected than being in a lower position. When I had a title and function that were well understood, for example when I was the head of an AID mission office in Pakistan or Ukraine, or I was the deputy director of AID in Bangladesh or Egypt, or I was the AID director in Jordan or Pakistan, my counterparts understood clearly what my role was and they didn't question it. The support that AID missions provide for more senior officers, like cars and drivers

whenever needed and staff who are clearly visible and working to support the senior official, reinforce the image of a senior U.S. government official who must be taken seriously.

*Q: Right. Interesting.*

AARNES: I think it was harder for women who were at lower levels, including FSN women, who might be brushed aside or treated disrespectfully. For me, some of the difficult times I experienced as a professional woman in Pakistan occurred in the AID mission in the late 1980s. In the first few months I was at post in 1988, I was brushed off rudely or ignored when I contacted the AID motor pool and GSO for services. The FSN men working there (they were all men) felt they didn't need to be responsive to me because they saw me as "just" the wife of a Foreign Service officer in the mission. The mission's EXO (Executive Officer) straightened that out. I heard from other women in the mission, including female FSNs, that these problems happened to them often. It's important to note that problems like that were similar in many ways to problems I had encountered in AID/Washington 15 or 20 years earlier.

The environment for women in the mission improved significantly under Jim Norris's leadership as mission director, and it improved even more when a woman, Nancy Tumavick, became the deputy mission director and supported those efforts.

*Q: The people at the top lead the way.*

AARNES: Yes, and there was an important demonstration of that a few years later, in 1991. The Pakistan mission tackled the issue of sexual harassment at that time when Jim Norris learned that a Pakistani female contractor had been harassed by one of the mission's male Pakistani staff. He was deeply concerned to find out about that incident and to hear that sexual harassment was considered by female FSNs to be a widespread problem, although it was very seldom mentioned to American staff, either male or female.

The U.S. government had begun to recognize sexual harassment as an important problem in the 1980s, and AID established an agency policy to try to prevent it and to deal with it effectively when it occurred. A few seminars had been held in AID/W to inform staff about the issue. However, sexual harassment was not a subject that had been discussed in the field. For the Pakistan mission, that changed when the mission director decided that sexual harassment by any mission staff must stop.

I had been assigned in Pakistan to serve as the Federal Women's Program Coordinator (FWPC) for the U.S. agencies at post, so I was directed to take the lead in organizing a response to this incident of sexual harassment. The goal was to educate the mission staff and prevent sexual harassment incidents from happening again. I put together a team of Pakistani and American mission employees to find out more about the problem. We worked with an expert consultant to design seminars for the staff to clarify AID's definition and rules regarding sexual harassment, to discuss problems in the mission, and

to emphasize expectations for the behavior of mission staff. Given the sensitivity of the topic, separate seminars were organized for male FSNs, female FSNs and American staff. We organized eight or nine separate seminars in all, to make sure every employee attended one. The mission director gave opening remarks at each seminar and FSNs took lead roles in conducting them. The seminars succeeded in bringing to light a problem which, we learned, had seriously affected female FSNs both personally and professionally.

*Q: Right. Sounds like the mission dealt with the problem head on. Now, how about your experience in socializing outside the mission? I imagine the kind of socializing that is often part of learning about a country and meeting counterparts is more difficult in a conservative country.*

AARNES: Yeah, it's more difficult. For example, at dinner parties, I was sometimes seated at the table with the VIP wives instead of with the VIPs themselves, because the VIPs were all men. That happened, on occasion, in both government and private sector events in Pakistan, Jordan and Bangladesh. Men and women were often separated at other representational events also, such as weddings, Iftars, or in paying condolence calls. Since my counterparts were generally men, the separation of men and women made it harder to build stronger work friendships. Of course, I met many more women because of the gender separation and got a better understanding of family life. Overall, though, since a lot of my counterparts were male, it was much more difficult to become friends with them, so I missed out on that kind of relationship. If my husband struck up a friendship with a counterpart then, sometimes, the four of us, as two couples, could be friends.

*Q: Oh, the wife would come? Because very often the wife doesn't come to these functions.*

AARNES: It depends on the couple and the country, but some women are very independent. Sometimes the wife does join her husband at receptions and dinners. We would generally make a special effort to include the wives. In Jordan, wives often joined these occasions.

*Q: Right, right. So, shall we finally bring you back to Washington?*

AARNES: Okay.

When Obama became president, he created a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Richard Holbrooke was selected to be the special representative, and he was just starting to visit Pakistan and get engaged when I left post in May 2009.

*Q: Sounds like you got out in time.*

AARNES: Definitely. Ambassador Holbrooke insisted on putting his personal stamp on everything and having a staff that was his own. I was certainly not in that category, in his view. At the same time, Congress was developing the Enhanced Partnership with

Pakistan Act, which is known as KLB, Kerry-Lugar-Berman, to provide a much higher level of funding for development assistance to Pakistan over the next five years. The act was passed in late 2009. It authorized up to \$7.5 billion over five years, 2010-2014, to assist Pakistan in democracy and rule of law, economic prosperity, and long-term development and infrastructure, including health, education, water management, and energy. Under Holbrooke's direction, with the new funds, there were some important changes in the AID assistance program, particularly, putting a large proportion of the funding into energy, infrastructure, and stabilization. But the structure of the program remained in many ways close to the way it had been. I think that might be indicative of the fact that the key development issues in Pakistan are indeed the key development issues in Pakistan.

*Q: And they're still there.*

AARNES: Yes, they are.

After leaving Pakistan, I started work as the Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator (SDAA) in the Middle East Bureau in Washington. It was a relatively small bureau, with seven bilateral programs: Iraq, West Bank/Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen and Egypt. It was a time of great uncertainty in the agency because there was a new administration, but no AID administrator was appointed for almost a year. Dr. Rajiv Shah was sworn in as the administrator at the end of 2009. Without an administrator, there had been no political appointments to fill high-level positions below the administrator's level, so every bureau in the agency had an acting head.

*Q: Right, career officers.*

AARNES: The agency made it through that year amazingly well considering the absence of top political leadership. The State/AID QDDR (Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review) got underway early in the second half of 2009, and all senior managers were pulled into it. It absorbed a great amount of staff time, and more and more staff were pulled in as the weeks and months wore on. When I left the job in July 2010, it was still half a year more before the QDDR report appeared.

By the time I got back to Washington in the summer of 2009, I had been overseas for 21 years straight, so spending 18 months on the QDDR, something that was so far off the ground, seemed strange. It seemed especially strange after two years in Pakistan grappling with the daily concrete challenges of a CPC.

*Q: And you probably went into it not convinced that the QDDR would make much of a difference?*

AARNES: Right, but we hoped it might resolve a few important matters like the leadership of PEPFAR, and give AID more of a voice in strategic planning. There were some benefits of the exercise, although not enough to balance the time spent. Still, in a

bureaucracy it's essential to pay close attention to exercises like the QDDR, because chances are that troublesome things will get into those documents if you're not watching, and then it's very hard to figure out how to deal with them once they're enshrined in a document. I found that what was needed, and sought, in some parts of the document was more credible voices with experience in dealing with realities on the ground overseas.

*Q: And you had that.*

AARNES: Yes, AID could at least advocate for getting the agency's perspectives and participation in multilateral engagement and in embassies dealing with development issues.

After I had been in the Middle East Bureau for about a year, I succeeded in getting an assignment to the National War College (NWC) as a member of the faculty conducting NWC's 10-month masters degree program in national security strategy. I found the job enormously challenging.

*Q: Lots of reading.*

AARNES: Huge amounts of reading, very interesting and useful. I had heard that the image in AID of war college assignments was that they were cushy, but my experience was just the opposite. The assignments were especially taxing for faculty, who had to read a substantial amount of new material every day, digest it all, and teach it. But it was intensely interesting to learn about the military and other agencies whose work is related to national security.

It was also useful to see development and AID from the perspective of the military and other national security agencies. The National War College was eager to have faculty and students from AID because we have a lot to contribute. It appeared to me that, compared with other agencies, including the military as they come up through the ranks, and some of the other civilian agencies, AID deals with strategies on a more regular basis as an integral part of conceptualizing, planning, and operating nearly all our programs. Many AID officers have experience in how strategies work as they go from the top to the bottom, and that experience is less common in some other agencies.

Most of the students come to the National War College not knowing what development is, and some of them, especially the military officers, have never heard of AID. It's a tiny agency, smaller than the military bands, as they point out, and our budget is a tiny percentage of military budgets. So for AID officers, teaching or being a student at one of the war colleges is a golden opportunity to explain an area that is critical to national security.

*Q: Military needs to know.*

AARNES: The military needs to know what development means, how it works, why it is



important for U.S. interests, and what role AID plays.

*Q: Why do you need one?*

AARNES: Why do you need AID? I found that military officers who had experience with operations on the ground and working with civilian populations were often fascinated to hear about development and about AID.

*Q: You did that for over two years?*

AARNES: I did it for two and a half years. Halfway through my third year, I was called by the agency to leave the National War College in order to go to Central Asia and serve as the regional mission director for the better part of a year. That position was unexpectedly vacant because the mission director had been called to fill a critical position in Washington. There weren't very many senior people in AID who could take a chunk of time at short notice to go to Central Asia. So, I agreed to do it, and I was there for nine months, based in Almaty.

*Q: Wow. And this was very different from your other assignments.*

AARNES: Yes, it was very different. It was interesting to see what was going on in the region and in the agency. I had always been curious about Central Asia. Also, I enjoyed being in a Russian-speaking environment again.

*Q: I'm trying to think, at that time had they set up the new capital?*

AARNES: They had. Astana became the official capital of Kazakhstan in 1997.

*Q: And were you in Astana?*

AARNES: No, the AID mission is still in Almaty. When Kazakhstan moved its capital to Astana, all the embassies moved up there. But it was decided that the AID mission would stay in Almaty because it was the headquarters of the regional mission for the five countries of Central Asia. Communications and travel connections between Kazakhstan and the other countries were much better in Almaty than in Astana, and many other international organizations were also staying in Almaty.

*Q: So, did that create challenges for communicating with the embassy staff or was this a program that really was not political in the same way that AID country development programs can be?*

AARNES: AID assistance in each country was strategically important to the U.S., and AID had country offices in each country capital. The AID regional mission in Almaty covered offices in four countries: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It also provided very extensive support to the AID office in Kyrgyzstan, which was in the

process of developing into a full AID mission. For Kazakhstan activities, there was a very competent AID officer based in the embassy in Astana, along with a couple of support staff. He worked closely with the ambassador and other embassy staff. In the other countries, the AID staffs were larger. But there were severe space constraints in almost every embassy, and in some countries, it was quite difficult to get visas to visit and even to work for a few days with the U.S. embassies there.

AID had been working in Central Asia for about 20 years, since shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The programs had shifted and the countries, some more than others, had gotten on their feet to a much greater extent. AID assistance levels had declined considerably. For the four countries covered by the regional mission, the total AID program budget for 2013 was \$60 million. In addition, the AID program in Kyrgyzstan had an annual budget of about \$40 million.

*Q: Were those programs mostly directed toward development needs or toward U.S. political interests? How did the ambassadors see them?*

AARNES: The programs were quite small in relation to many other AID missions, but they were very important to the ambassadors. The value of the programs was that they provided high quality expertise and could help the country address important development issues, while also contributing to the U.S. relationship with the country.

*Q: And they were development activities for the most part?*

AARNES: Yes. But they were development activities that were small scale compared with programs in other countries.

*Q: Right, right.*

AARNES: AID's development activities were highly valued by the ambassadors because they provided a whole other dimension to the U.S. relationship with the country. They helped the U.S. develop an entrée into a variety of issues, and they provided targeted assistance on issues that were critical to those countries. In the future, perhaps some countries in other regions will be in similar situations. AID's work in Central Asia might provide some useful lessons in developing and managing those programs.

*Q: Well, because it was so important to the ambassador, was he or she always making suggestions or wanting to visit? Or supportive of the work?*

AARNES: The ambassadors were very supportive. They appreciated the funds that were coming in, and the well-targeted activities. They worked closely with the AID staff. Not all of them got along perfectly with each other, but on the whole the relationships were quite good.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: In the Central Asia mission, a large proportion of the AID officers were junior. I had noticed that in Pakistan, and it was true as well in Almaty and in all the country offices. It was a vivid indication of the extent to which the agency had been hollowed out. There were very few people with 10 or 20 years of experience. There were only those of us on one end or the other, either very senior or very junior. It was clear that sometimes programs and relationships with counterparts ran into serious problems because of the lack of experienced staff to manage the operations and guide the new staff.

*Q: Right. And you were there such a short period of time you couldn't really get into a deep mentoring relationship but I'm sure if people had come and asked you how do you handle this, you'd work with them.*

AARNES: Yes, I worked closely with the staff at all levels while I was there, to the extent that I could, but there wasn't much time.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: In some ways it was frustrating because I was not there for long enough to put in place changes in mission systems to deal with the change in staffing realities. I made the changes that were possible in nine months. But I know AID missions worldwide were facing many of the same kinds of problems in managing programs without a staff that had a balance of experience and expertise.

*Q: Right, right. Did the junior staff sort of appreciate that they were junior and not as experienced as they needed to be? Because I have heard people complain there's a fair amount of arrogance in these junior staff who don't really know what they don't know.*

AARNES: That's true. I found the junior staff, by and large, bright, energetic, and committed. And yes, there's a certain amount of arrogance but to some extent, it comes because they are being asked to handle complicated tasks by themselves without anyone working with them to guide them and explain the situation. There were instances when that really grated with some of the senior FSNs.

*Q: Of course, of course.*

AARNES: Sometimes the junior staff could come off to their counterparts in the host governments and in NGOs as arrogant and not well informed. But that is also an indication of the drastic shortage of senior and mid-level staff in AID, and the kinds of problems that needed to be dealt with. Everyone there wanted to do a good job and be effective. I still cringe when I remember times when I was arrogant, in my first years in AID, and I'm thankful for the bosses who interceded and kept me on track.

*Q: Yes, indeed.*

AARNES: One of the notable characteristics of AID's assistance to Central Asia was the tight State Department control over the budget and all program activities. It was particularly complicated because the remains of a coordinator's office still existed in the State Department, with a staff many of whom had been working there for years. AID staff had excellent relationships with them. But I was amazed at how long it took for every single item of the budget to be negotiated.

*Q: Negotiated with State, not with the country.*

AARNES: With State. AID didn't have bilateral agreements with those countries.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: The budget had to be negotiated with State down to the specific activities, a few hundred thousand dollars, or sometimes much less, at a time. That system doesn't make for a particularly coherent or effective program. The result tends to be a collection of small, discrete activities that often are not designed to reinforce each other to have more impact. For AID missions, the process produces a very high planning, budgeting, contracting, and management load for relatively small amounts of money.

*Q: Were you able to have any impact on the program in that situation?*

AARNES: Yes, perhaps a little, because a major mission priority that year was to draft a new five-year strategy. The agency was developing new strategies for every country. AID's new policy bureau, PPL (Policy, Programming and Learning) had laid out a process for creating these strategies, starting with a rigorous analysis of development needs in each country, whether and how AID assistance would be important.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: We came up with a sound five-year strategy focusing on energy, water and health. Those were areas where AID had expertise and that were crucial to building the economies of the countries we were dealing with and also to lessening their isolation. Central Asia is one of the world's most isolated regions, and the Central Asian countries are even isolated from each other. We presented the draft strategy in an inter-agency DVC. I explained what our thinking had been and how we had chosen to focus the strategy. Sure enough, a representative from AID's budget office said, "There isn't any money available for the energy and water sectors in Central Asia. You can't do those sectors." His view was that the strategy could mention the health sector, but it wasn't supposed to mention water and energy because the Central Asia mission was not slated to receive any funding in those sectors in the years to come. There's extraordinarily little flexibility in the agency budgets.

*Q: And you didn't know that?*

AARNES: Yes, we all knew what we were walking into.

*Q: But you wanted to lay out what you wanted?*

AARNES: Yes. In the DVC, we noted that the agency guidance for putting together this strategy required that we analyze very carefully what the greatest needs were for these countries. We noted that water and energy were the most vital needs, so that's why we included them. It was important to articulate what we saw as the most critical problems that AID could work with those countries to alleviate. Otherwise, our funds and programs could not make a significant difference in helping those countries. We said that in case there is absolutely no funding available now for Central Asia in those sectors, we hoped that over time some funding would be found so we could engage with these issues. But even if no funding was found, it would be essential to pursue other actions such as convening meetings so that discussion and awareness of the issues would not drop.

*Q: What did you think you could accomplish by making that argument?*

AARNES: It was a quixotic effort to some extent, but developing a new strategy for Central Asia was a rare opportunity to get beyond some of the usual constraints, such as State's tight control of program and funding decisions, and we didn't want to settle for a "strategy" that didn't seriously consider the most important issues. Fortunately, the effort in this case was reasonably successful. Our draft strategy was approved. The final version of the strategy, which was developed over the following year, retained largely the same priorities as our draft. The mission continued to do some work in energy that was exceptionally valuable to both Central and South Asia.

But the fundamental problem remains. So much of AID's funds now are tied down that it can be extremely difficult to address any other issues that might be more important.

*Q: Let me ask you this because it's been a problem for a long time. Do you think that's just the way it is and will increasingly be concentrated on humanitarian assistance and sort of a broad health program or do you think AID's been a little weak about going up to the Hill and saying you've got to cut loose?*

AARNES: I think that when we can't seriously approach issues that are clearly critical, then AID should go to the Hill and make a much stronger case for those issues.

*Q: That are just being neglected. There must be some champions on the Hill for energy, for water, for other critical areas.*

AARNES: There are. But if they don't hear from the agency then of course nothing will change.

*Q: That's true, that's true.*

AARNES: There would be people that could be convinced at least that the issues are important to explore, because the situation now has become almost bizarre.

*Q: Right, yes, agree.*

AARNES: So, after leaving Central Asia, the next thing I did—

*Q: Another year, another program.*

AARNES: Yes, exactly. I had planned to retire after I left Central Asia, but then the agency ran into another problem. Larry Sampler, who was the Assistant to the Administrator for the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, OAPA, got in touch with me to see if I would agree to be the Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator (SDAA) for OAPA. That office functioned as a bureau, and it was as big as a bureau. I would be overall in charge of Pakistan for AID in Washington. In this case also, the agency didn't have enough experienced senior staff to fill key jobs. In addition, because AID had been out of Pakistan for a period of nearly ten years, there weren't yet many AID senior staff who had had experience there. So, I moved to OAPA and worked in that job for a year. During that year, the mission and OAPA worked together to develop a strategic framework to tackle the most important development issues that were closely related to U.S. strategic interests. A great deal of time was spent negotiating with SRAP (office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan) in the State Department.

*Q: And you did most of that representation work?*

AARNES: We all worked at it. My main contact was Beth Jones, the PDAS (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary) in SRAP. It was a very strong relationship, productive for both State and AID, during her tenure.

Several of the people in SRAP strongly favored putting most of the AID money for Pakistan into infrastructure projects. That had to do with the wishes of some of the top officials in Pakistan's federal government.

*Q: That was what they had been asking for?*

AARNES: Yes. But in AID's view, we were already doing a lot of infrastructure work and had concluded that increasing our infrastructure efforts at the expense of work in other sectors would not be the most effective way to help Pakistan. The pressure on AID was to put most of our funds aside for future mega projects, which far exceeded U.S. government resources and would require private sector investment in any case. For example, one mega dam that was being proposed would cost an estimated \$14 billion and it wouldn't be ready to start construction for years. We advocated building up to it in a different way, putting more attention on helping Pakistan assure that the project was technically and financially viable, and helping them attract private sector investors.

*Q: Right.*

AARNES: And continuing our ongoing infrastructure programs as well as assistance to other critical sectors. A great deal of time was absorbed in those discussions.

*Q: You prevailed?*

AARNES: We prevailed in not losing education, health, and economic growth programs.

*Q: You didn't have to close them down, yes.*

AARNES: We didn't have to close them down during that time, although I understand that they have continued to be under pressure as AID's overall funding for Pakistan has declined. But in OAPA during that year, we persisted because it was clear that poor education and poor health were among the major problems keeping Pakistan from moving forward. Pakistan was not going to be able to advance significantly until it could strengthen those systems. Pakistan also desperately needs to create jobs for its young people. And as the decades roll on, it's crucial to insist that U.S. assistance efforts continue to encourage and support Pakistan to progress in these sectors.

The year I worked in OAPA, 2013-2014, was the last year of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, Kerry-Lugar-Berman. Two years later, in 2016, an audit report was issued on AID's effectiveness in achieving the objectives of the legislation. A major conclusion of the audit was that State's pressure to achieve short-term political priorities interfered with AID's long-term development objectives. The audit also commented that State's priorities for energy and stabilization had taken precedence over other development priorities for economic growth, education, and health. These are continuing issues.

*Q: What were AID's relationships with Congress like?*

AARNES: There was a great deal of congressional interest, and a lot of skepticism, about what was going on in Pakistan. The whole OAPA team spent tremendous amounts of time answering questions from Congress and meeting with members on the Hill. Overall, the relationships were good. The OAPA desk and the technical officers were particularly experienced in working with the Hill staffers and met with them often.

*Q: After OAPA, you finally were allowed to retire?*

AARNES: No, not quite. In the fall of 2014, the agency needed someone to take over as the SDAA in the Asia Bureau and to be the acting assistant administrator until the political nominee was confirmed. So I was tapped to do that. I left OAPA and worked in the Asia Bureau for a year. In December 2014, after I had been in the Asia Bureau for three months, the Senate unexpectedly had an opportunity to confirm a lot of pending nominees. The nominee for the Asia Bureau, Jonathan Stivers, was confirmed in that

group. I stayed for about eight more months before I retired, mainly to work with him on getting settled. Jon had never worked in the bureaucracy or on development programs before coming to AID.

*Q: What was his background?*

AARNES: He had worked for Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi for 15 years. He was very smart, thoughtful, and he had worked on a number of international issues.

*Q: Right. But development wasn't one of them.*

AARNES: Development wasn't one of them. But he was very interested in what AID was doing, did his homework, and was very vocal, speaking up on the whole range of issues, including administrative issues. The agency was fortunate to have him come in, that late in an administration, to lead the Asia Bureau.

*Q: Right. And fortunate that you were there to ease the transition.*

AARNES: Many of the programs in Asian countries were very small. Activities were carefully selected which were important both to the U.S. relationship and to the people of the country. Those programs demonstrate how AID assistance can work in Central Asia and in some of the Southeast Asian countries that are more prosperous, lower middle income countries with some real needs where AID can help them and also advance broader U.S. foreign policy interests at the same time. The agency's systems were not designed to support countries at that stage of development, and our conceptualization of what AID does doesn't exactly include those situations. I think cases like that will occur more often in the future and AID's thinking needs to shift.

*Q: That's right. Interesting. But you need a sort of a cafeteria approach so that when you get into a small program, if it's tourism or if it's higher education or something else, you don't have to think it all through from scratch; you can actually call on resources that are pre-positioned.*

AARNES: Yes, and you can then have a way of managing a program perhaps with one person on-site or not, and make a convincing argument for those resources. Maintain the rigor of conceptualizing needs and planning activities, but without the larger-scale operations and support systems in each country that are needed for larger programs.

*Q: A full-fledged mission with contracting and programming officers and whatever.*

AARNES: Yes, but we need to preserve AID's in-country presence at some level. Having on-the-ground expertise with a depth of understanding of the problems and of what works is part of AID's unique value as a separate component of U.S. security strategy.

*Q: Right.*



AARNES: So I finished my stint in the Asia Bureau and retired from AID in the fall of 2015.

*Q: Well, Anne Aarnes, thank you. What an amazing career.*

AARNES: Thank you. I loved it.

*End of interview*