Keynote Speakers

Jerry White, Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations  
Department of State

Jerry White has over twenty-five years’ experience leading change-making campaigns to prevent mass destruction and increase civilian security worldwide. A social entrepreneur and senior Ashoka Fellow, White has helped train next-generation leadership in scores of countries to transform highly contentious issues into opportunities to unify communities, generate jobs and build stability and hope.

White currently serves as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the new Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, where he is responsible for the Burma and Libya portfolios, as well as three new offices: Policy, Partnerships, and Training. He co-chairs the State Department’s sub-working group on religion and conflict mitigation, responsible for outreach to diverse civil society leaders and religious actors working to break cycles of violence.

A native of Boston’s South Shore, White was the first Irish Catholic to graduate magna cum laude with honors in Judaic Studies from Brown University. He also earned an MBA from the University of Michigan.

When he was twenty, White lost his leg to a landmine explosion while hiking in northern Israel. Seeking to build something positive from that experience, he has dedicated his life to nonproliferation and building resilience in individuals and communities affected by violent conflict. He was the assistant director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control and founding editor of “Risk Report” a database designed to track sales of dual-use technologies going to build weapons of mass destruction. His co-founding of the Landmine Survivors Network, and later Survivor Corps, led him to pioneer techniques in victim-assistance strategies, providing tens of thousands of amputees with home visits, job training, artificial limbs, small business grants, and peer mentors. White wrote about his experience transforming victims into survivors and leaders in Getting Up When Life Knocks You Down: Five Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis (St. Martin’s Press).

White shares in the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. His 1997 trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina with Diana, Princess of Wales, was the event credited with putting the spotlight on the plight of hundreds of thousands of victims wounded by mines worldwide. White specializes in building cross-border coalitions and history-making campaigns, three of which led to major international treaties: the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Cluster Munitions Treaty; and the Mine Ban Treaty.

In 2009-2011, White chaired the most successful civil society campaign since the 1950s in Israel to secure the first unanimous Knesset vote passing legislation to clear all non-operational minefields, including the Baptism Site of Jesus on the Jordan River. White was pursuing a graduate degree in Theology and Religious Studies at Cambridge University when he was called to serve in the Obama administration.

Eliza Griswold, Author

Eliza Griswold is an award-winning American journalist and poet. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship for her ongoing work on water and poverty in America. Her first nonfiction book, The Tenth Parallel, was awarded the Anthony J. Lukas prize and was a New York Times bestseller. She is a fellow at the New America Foundation and won a 2010 Rome Prize from the American Academy of
Arts and Letters. She is a former Nieman Fellow, and has been published in The New Yorker, Harper’s Magazine, and the New York Times Magazine.


Farah Pandith
Former Special Representative to Muslim Communities
Department of State

Farah Pandith the Former Special Representative to Muslim Communities was first appointed in June 2009 by then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Under the leadership of Secretary John Kerry, the Office of the Special Representative was responsible for executing a vision for engagement with Muslims around the world based on a people-to-people and organizational level. Pandith has traveled to more than 80 countries and launched youth-focused initiatives including Generation Change, Viral Peace and Hours Against Hate (a campaign that was a partner with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.) She is also a key architect of the Women in Public Service Project. In January 2013 she was awarded the Secretary’s Distinguished Honor Award which is given for "exceptionally outstanding service to the agencies of the U.S. Government resulting in achievements of marked national or international significance." She reported directly to the Secretary of State.

Prior to this appointment, she was Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. In this role she was focused on Muslim communities in Europe where she was responsible for policy oversight for integration, democracy, and Islam in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. She also worked on issues relating to countering violent Islamic extremism. She served as the Director for Middle East Regional Initiatives for the National Security Council from December 2004 to February 2007, where she was responsible for coordinating U.S. policy on “Muslim World” Outreach and the Broader Middle East North Africa initiative. She reported directly to the Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy.

Prior to joining the NSC, Pandith was Chief of Staff for the Bureau for Asia and the Near East for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). She worked directly for the Assistant Administrator for the bureau responsible for more than $4 billion in programs throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and Asia -- including Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza/West Bank. In 2004, she spent two months in Kabul, Afghanistan. From 1997 to 2003 Pandith was Vice President of International Business for ML Strategies in Boston, Massachusetts. Pandith also served as the Special Assistant to the Director of Policy at USAID and has been a consultant in both the public, private and non-profit sectors. She has served in leadership positions on several boards with a focus on international affairs and is a Member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Pandith received a Master’s degree from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where she specialized in International Security Studies, Islamic Civilizations and Southwest Asia, and International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution. She concentrated on the insurgency in Kashmir and has spoken on the subject in international and domestic forums. She received an A.B. in Government and Psychology from Smith College, where she was president of the student body. She has served as a Trustee of Smith College and Milton Academy and is currently a
member of the Board of Overseers of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. She was born in Srinagar, Kashmir, India.