



#### Fact Sheet

Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues  
Washington, DC  
February 22, 2005

## U.S. Commitment to Women in Afghanistan

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*The struggle for women's rights is a story of ordinary women doing extraordinary things. And today, the women of Afghanistan are writing a new chapter in their history.*

--First Lady Laura Bush, March 12, 2004

Since the fall of Taliban in 2001, the United States has implemented more than 200 projects for Afghan women to increase women's political participation, build civil society, create economic opportunities, support the education of girls and women, and increase access to health care. Afghanistan has achieved some remarkable milestones during the past year to secure women's human rights and civil and social gains. Among the significant achievements were the drafting of the Constitution, ratified on January 4, 2004 that provides equal rights to all citizens--men and women--and the successful presidential elections held on October 9, 2004.

**Constitutional Loya Jirga and Elections.** An Afghan Constitutional Loya Jirga, or Council, approved a new constitution on January 4, 2004 in Kabul. The new constitution affords all citizens of Afghanistan--men and women--equal rights and duties before the law. The new constitution also reserves 25% of its seats in the lower house and 17% in the upper house of Parliament for women. Of the 500 members at the Constitutional Loya Jirga, 102 were women. Two of the nine members of the Constitutional Drafting Committee and seven of the 35 members of the Constitutional Review Commission were women. More than 200 women participated in the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga that established the transitional government. Women comprised over 41% of the 10.5 million registered voters for the October 2004 presidential elections, which included a woman candidate. Millions of Afghans, men and women, voted on October 9, 2004 in Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election.

**Women Leaders.** The new Cabinet, appointed in December 2004, includes three women ministers -- the Minister of Women's Affairs, the Minister of Martyrs and Disabled and the Minister of Youth Affairs. A woman heads the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Many more women serve in the public and private sectors.

**Programs for Women.** The Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs has created an Office of Human Rights, Health and Women's Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to monitor women's programs. The Afghan Ministry of Commerce set up a Department of Women's Entrepreneurship to help women establish their own businesses.

#### Political Participation and Civil Society

**Women's Resource Centers.** The United States has allocated \$2.65 million for the construction of an initial 17 Women's Resource Centers throughout Afghanistan. The centers will support outreach, advocacy, and policy formation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and create a space in rural provinces for training women in education, health, job skills, leadership, legal awareness, and political participation. Four centers are now operational, two are ready for opening shortly, and the remaining eleven are under construction. Through the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, the United States is providing \$1 million in educational training at the centers. Women executives of AOL/Time Warner have raised \$60,000 for the Council's Gift Fund to support a provincial women's resource center in Afghanistan.

**Electoral Assistance.** The U.S. has given over \$100 million to support the Afghan elections. This funding includes \$15 million for voter registration, and \$8.86 million for civic and voter education, focus group research, training for political parties, and civic activists. The United States also provided training in political advocacy for women delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003. Approximately 10.5 million Afghans registered to vote. Forty-one percent of all voters registered are women. In the major provincial cities of Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, where U.S.-supported women's radio stations operate, the number of women who registered to vote was considerably higher than the national average. Planning is now underway to support the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2005.

**Legal Rights and Information.** The United States is providing \$3.5 million for private sector development for women and to secure women's property rights. The latter is being conducted to help educate women about their property rights in Islam and assisting them to gain access to legal assistance to use new, more transparent administrative and judicial processes. The United States provided \$5 million to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

**Media Training.** The United States has provided more than \$500,000 to train women journalists and filmmakers, some of whom produced "Afghanistan Unveiled," a film documentary about abuses against women by the Taliban and "Women in Politics," (working title) a film about women's political participation through running for elections and voting.

#### Economic Opportunities

**Microenterprise and Microcredit Initiatives.** Microenterprise training and access to microcredit help women gain self-sufficiency by starting their own businesses. Through a \$10,000 donation to the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council from Daimler-Chrysler, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a non-governmental organization, established two village banks in Herat. Daimler-Chrysler contributed an additional \$25,000 in February 2004 to construct another five community banks to support microfinance loans for women in the province. With additional funding from the U.S. Government and other donors, FINCA expects to assist more than 30,000 clients in Afghanistan over the next 5 years. USAID's \$10-million Literacy & Community Empowerment Program (LCEP) targets rural women and their families in 200 communities. The LCEP promotes personal and community self-sufficiency through community savings and loans, enterprise training and linkages to microcredit services. Other microenterprise initiatives for women totaling more than \$9 million provide skills and literacy training. These include training of 25,000 women in animal husbandry, developing skills in tailoring, and preservation of produce and dairy products for sale; technical support to women's carpet and textile projects; and funding bakeries that employ widows and provide subsidized bread to hundreds of thousands of urban poor.

**Afghan Conservation Corps.** The United States contributed \$3.2 million to the Afghan Conservation Corps (ACC) to rehabilitate the environment. ACC worked with vulnerable, unskilled women to improve the environmental productivity and beauty of an urban hospital, teaching them to grow flowers and vegetables, to irrigate and weed. At a girls' high school, the women grew vegetables for the school kitchen as well as flowers and shrubs for the school grounds.

#### Education

**Back-to-School.** Close to 5 million Afghan children are enrolled in school and 40% are girls--the highest percentage of female students in Afghanistan's history. Since 2001, the United States has dedicated \$60.5 million for primary education, to construct schools, train teachers, and provide books and supplies.

**Literacy Programs.** The United States has initiated two major literacy programs totaling almost \$10 million, linked with skills development for healthcare workers and enterprise development, and supports a number of smaller literacy initiatives. Of this amount, \$4 million supports the establishment of the Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul and its first program, the Afghan Literacy Initiative for 200 rural villages. Nine public libraries in eight provinces are participating in a campaign for women's literacy.

**Teacher Training.** Since March 2002, the United States, through partners such as the University of Nebraska and Creative Associates, has worked to improve the quality of basic education. USAID has printed 27 million textbooks, provided face to face training to 6,800 teachers and radio teacher training to another 25,000 teachers, and enrolled 170,000 students (70% girls) in accelerated learning programs in 17 provinces. The University of Nebraska has printed and distributed another 15 million textbooks and supported teacher training.

**Fulbright Program.** After a 25-year hiatus, 17 Afghan Fulbright grantees, including five women, arrived in the United States in summer 2004 to begin study at American universities. The scholars are focusing on areas that assist Afghanistan's national development, such as law, political science, public administration, economics, English-language teaching and journalism.

**National Women's Dormitory.** The U.S. rehabilitated the national Women's Dormitory with \$8.1 million, and has allocated another \$3 million for maintenance, management, and food services over 3 years. These will enable more than 1,100 primarily rural women to attend one of four institutions of higher learning in Kabul.

**Afghan Youth Sports Exchange.** In summer of 2004, girls from Afghanistan visited the U.S. to learn soccer techniques and leadership skills so that they can organize school and city teams when they return home. The girls, who range in age from 11 to 16 years, are part of the Afghan Youth Sports Exchange -- a program whose mission is to develop Afghan youth into leaders who will bring athletics to their communities. The program hopes to create a lasting change in Afghanistan by building youth recreation programs.

#### **Health Care**

The United States has financed health care programs in Afghanistan totaling more than \$87 million with a primary focus on reducing one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. These programs include training women as healthcare workers, community midwives and midwives; maternal/neonatal tetanus immunizations; improving hospital care including the construction of women's wings in hospitals and dormitories for women medical students; and the strengthening of maternal and child health, family planning, and nutrition services, particularly in rural areas. The United States has rebuilt 26 health clinics, and an additional 179 are under construction. Over 700 MOH and NGO midwives have graduated or are being trained; over 2,000 community health workers have been trained and 1,000 are currently undergoing training. The U.S. supports basic health services in 250 health clinics; each clinic averages 989 patients per month, primarily women and children, totaling 247,000 patients served monthly. Overall, the U.S. has provided basic health services to about seven million people in 13 provinces. Most of the recipients are women and children.

Contact: Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues  
phone: 202-312-9664  
website: <http://www.state.gov/wi/>

