



#### Fact Sheet

Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues  
Washington, DC  
May 13, 2005

## U.S. Commitment to Afghan Women: The U.S.-Afghan Women's Council

After the fall of the Taliban, the United States launched a historic initiative to help elevate the status of women in Afghanistan. To accelerate progress, President George W. Bush and President Hamid Karzai announced the creation of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council (USAWC) on January 28, 2002. The Council promotes public-private partnerships between U.S. and Afghan institutions and mobilizes private sector resources to help Afghan women. Specifically, the Council seeks to identify concrete actions to bring real and practical benefits to the women of Afghanistan and to enable them to participate and take leadership roles in the political and economic life of their country. To this end, the Council has made education and microfinance its top priorities.

### Meetings

The Council meets twice a year, alternating between Kabul and Washington, DC, to discuss programs and priorities for assisting Afghan women and to review progress. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky co-chairs the Council with the Afghan Foreign Minister and the Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs. Refer to <http://usawc.state.gov/c10666.htm> for more information about Council members.



**March 2005.** The Council's sixth meeting was held in Kabul, Afghanistan at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 29. Council members and American and Afghan special guests discussed economic participation, legal/judicial issues, political participation and the parliamentary election, education/literacy, and access to health care. In conjunction with the USAWC delegation visit, First Lady Laura Bush made a special trip to Kabul. She met with teachers, students, aspiring entrepreneurs who were USAWC Artemis grantees, and the Afghan Women's Conservation Corps. The First Lady announced U.S. funding to create an American University and an International School. Delegation members also met with women judges who were USAWC grantees and Afghan judicial officials to discuss legal and judicial development. The Artemis project, which was initiated by a Council member, brought 15 Afghan women entrepreneurs to Thunderbird University's Garvin School of International Management (Phoenix, Arizona) for a 2-week intensive seminar, and linked each entrepreneur to an American

mentor. Refer to the April 4, 2005 *Financial Times* business section for a complete story about Artemis.

**June 2004.** The Council's fifth meeting was held in Washington, DC, in the Treaty Room of the White House on June 15, 2004. Members and invited Afghan and American special guests discussed several key issues, including the Afghan national elections, health care, and jobs. President Bush, President Karzai, Secretary Powell, National Security Advisor Rice, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Thompson met with the group. First Lady Laura Bush honored the Council with a lunch. More than 20 Afghan women attended the meeting and the lunch, including four Afghan Fulbright scholars (a U.S. Department of State educational exchange program), four Afghan women judges on a USAWC training project, and 12 U.S. Department of Agriculture Cochran Fellows in the U.S. for a U.S. Department of Agriculture program for job training in agribusiness.

**February 2004.** The fourth meeting of the Council was held in Kabul, February 24-26, 2004. Discussions focused on education, specifically the Teacher Training Institute and Afghan Literacy initiative; microfinance; the new constitution; and the elections in Fall 2004. The delegation visited a women's center and met with project managers of programs supported by the U.S. Government and by the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

**July 2003.** The Council's third meeting, in Washington, DC, July 15-16, 2003, focused on the educational needs of women and girls, job skills training, business development, and the upcoming elections. The delegation met with First Lady Laura Bush and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice at the White House. Secretary Powell hosted a luncheon in their honor.

**January 2003.** At the Council's second meeting in Kabul, the U.S. announced that it would provide \$2.5 million for women's resource centers in 14 of Afghanistan's provinces. The Council also committed \$1 million in education and exchange programs for the centers. Programs at these centers focus on basic education literacy, microfinance and small business opportunities, human rights education, and the development and management of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

**Inaugural Meeting.** The inaugural meeting took place in Washington, DC in April 2002. In response to a request from the Afghan side, the Council later announced its first initiative would bring Afghan women who work in government ministries to the United States for an educational exchange program. The program focused on computer training, leadership, and management training, and other skills vital to their positions.

### Accomplishments

#### Political Participation

**Women's Resource Center.** USAID is building 17 Women's Resource Centers in Afghanistan. Ten centers have been completed, and seven are under construction with completion scheduled by late Summer 2005. Through USWAC, women executives of AOL (Time Warner) donated \$60,000 for the construction of the resource center in Parwan.

**Afghan Women Leaders Connect (AWLC) (\$20,000).** This contribution supported a conference in Kabul in Fall 2004 focusing on legal rights hosted by the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation. This is in addition to the Summer 2004 grant of \$10,000 that AWLC provided to the International Association of Women Judges to supplement the \$75,000 grant by the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau, which trained four Afghan women judges in civil and family law.

**Digital Video Conference.** The Council has used digital video conference (DVC) technology to connect Kabul, Washington, DC, and New York City, setting up links for discussions and mentoring sessions between women in these cities. The DVC in November 2003 focused on women's political participation in Afghanistan's draft constitution and the Afghan elections in 2004. The DVC in April 2003 focused on the topic of women and business.

#### Economic Opportunities

**Community Banks.** The Council views microcredit as an important means of helping women gain self-sufficiency through starting their own businesses. Through an original \$10,000 donation to the Council from Daimler-Chrysler, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a leading non-governmental organization in microfinance, helped start 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 Herat 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. During the March 2005 Council meeting in Kabul, Freddie Mac pledged a \$40,000 grant for entrepreneurial training and micro loans for widows.

**U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs/USAWC Department of State Grants (\$750,000).** Five grants were awarded to organizations for proposals that

include: business and political leadership training (grant to World Learning); entrepreneurship training (grant to Women for Afghan Women); education and literacy training (grants to American Council for International Education and Institute for Training and Development); and women's leadership training (grant to University of Delaware). Thus far, 71 women have taken leadership training under the University of Delaware grant.

**"Artemis" Project at Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management.** Fifteen Afghan women successfully completed advanced entrepreneurship training in January 2005. The participants aim to start businesses that would create jobs for women and to serve as mentors/teachers in Afghanistan.

**Global Summit of Women (\$40,000).** Supported by USAID, a delegation of nine Afghan women attended the 2004 Global Summit in Seoul, Korea, in May to discuss trade opportunities and receive entrepreneurship training.

**Arzu Carpet Initiative (\$555,000).** This program provides training and literacy skills to Afghan women in the hand-knotted carpet industry. Connie Duckworth, a USAWC member, provided the seed money to get the project started. Arzu placed its first carpet order on International Women's Day (March 8, 2004). The project Arzu (which means "Hope" in Dari) not only creates jobs and a cottage industry, it also recirculates some of its profits to support microcredit initiatives and additional training for women.

**Women's Conservation Corps.** A division of the Afghan Conservation Corps, this \$1-million initiative trains vulnerable and unskilled women to rehabilitate Afghanistan's environment by growing flowers and vegetables and planting trees. During the delegation visit to Kabul in March 2005, First Lady Laura Bush and a member of the Women's Conservation Corps planted a tree on the grounds of the Women's Teacher Training Institute.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture Cochran Fellowships.** Twelve women representing five provinces came to the United States in Spring 2004 for job training as managers and technicians in agribusiness.

**Handicraft Training (\$130,000).** The Global Summit of Women (July 2002 in Barcelona, Spain) donated approximately \$10,000 for job-skills training for women. Through this program, Shuhada, a local organization, is training women in weaving skills. At the conclusion of the program, the women will receive their own looms to produce textiles for market.

#### Media

**Women Journalists.** Public Broadcasting Services (PBS), through USAWC auspices, has trained four women journalists who work for AINA, a Kabul-based media training non-governmental organization. PBS also has provided modern digital video production and editing equipment for the women video filmmakers to use in Afghanistan and training videos for use at AINA. AINA was a partner for a U.S.-funded documentary film oral history project in 2002 with The Asia Foundation that produced an award-winning film called "Afghanistan Unveiled" and trained 14 aspiring women film makers. PBS indirectly helped sustain the project by paying \$20,000 in royalties and rights for the film, which depicts life under the Taliban and the journalists' journey for the truth. PBS broadcast the film in November 2004. The women trained for this project made a second film, "If I Stand Up" that toured Afghanistan via mobile vans in the months before the October 2004 elections. These films and several short videos to encourage women to vote were made by the "women's project" at AINA with Department of State and USAID funding (from Summer 2002 through the October 2004 elections). The Asia Foundation (TAF) continues to host training sessions and screenings of "Afghanistan Unveiled" (California, Maryland and Sundance Festivals.)

#### Health

**Health Committee.** On July 26, 2004, the Council's newly formed Health Advisory Committee sponsored a special session to discuss health issues and create public/private partnerships to utilize resources for greater impact and sustainability. Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky hosted the organizing meeting for the committee.

**Midwife Training.** The \$5-million Rural Education and Community Health Care Initiative (REACH) provides health-related accelerated learning and basic literacy training for women and girls. Training takes place in the Women's Centers and targets provinces with the highest maternal mortality rates such as Ghazni, Baghlan, and Badakhshan. In April 2004, REACH graduated its first 25 midwives from the program, after they completed an 18-month program in Jalalabad. This pilot program is being replicated across Afghanistan. For each new midwife, the U.S. is supporting a lifetime of lives saved.

**Afghan Family Health Book.** In Fall 2004, U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson initiated the roll-out of the "Afghan Family Health Book" across Afghanistan. This "talking book" provides useful and practical information about health practices and hygiene, focusing on health promotion and disease prevention. The books are being distributed via hospitals, clinics, and women's centers. The project was developed with Leapfrog Enterprises Inc., a developer, designer, and manufacturer of technology-based educational products.

#### Education

**Women's Teacher Training Institute (\$4 million).** In cooperation with USAID, First Lady Laura Bush announced a USAWC initiative to establish a Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul in tandem with The Afghan Literacy Initiative, designed to help teach basic literacy to Afghan women in rural areas of Afghanistan. The Institute opened in September 2004. The Institute's first program, Afghan Literacy Initiative for 200 rural villages, is in progress. During the March 2005 Council meeting in Kabul, Microsoft donated 70 computers for the Institute. Some of those computers were given to women judges who were sponsored by USAWC for training in the U.S. in 2004.

**Fulbright Scholarships.** Five Afghan women were awarded Fulbright scholarships for the academic year 2004-2005 for advanced graduate-level study in the U.S.

**Teacher Training.** Since 2002, the USAWC has supported an important teacher-training exchange program that brings 30 Afghan women teachers to the University of Nebraska every 6 months for training. In turn, these women will train other teachers in Afghanistan.

**Afghan Youth Sports Exchange.** In Summer 2004, girls from Afghanistan visited the U.S. to learn soccer techniques and leadership skills so that they could organize school and city teams when they returned home. The girls, who ranged in age from 11 to 16 years, were 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.

**U.S. Leadership Management and Computer Education.** The Council's first major program, in September and October 2002, brought 14 women from various Afghan government ministries to the United States for an educational exchange program. During their 4-week stay, they received training in computer skills, proposal writing, communications, and leadership management. Each participant received a laptop computer to use while training in the United States and to take home to use in Afghanistan. The women met with President George W. Bush and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice at the White House, and with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell at a Department reception held in their honor. They also had the opportunity to interact with senior policymakers, Members of Congress, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. In Austin, Texas, they studied the interaction among federal, state, and local entities. Their program concluded in New York City where the participants met with representatives of the United Nations.

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