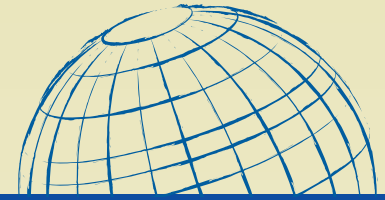


INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES NEWSLETTER



U.S. First Lady Visits Afghanistan

On March 30, U.S. First Lady Laura Bush joined the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council for their regularly scheduled meeting in Kabul. Her presence, said Afghan President Hamid Karzai, "will help remind the world that Afghans are grateful for U.S. and coalition support as they rebuild Afghanistan and at the same time highlight some critical needs, especially in the areas of education and health infrastructure."



State Department photo

U.S. First Lady Laura Bush speaking at newly opened Teacher Training Institute in Kabul, Afghanistan March 30, 2005.

In her opening remarks at the newly established Women's Teacher Training Institute, Mrs. Bush said, "I have especially watched with great pride as courageous women across Afghanistan have taken on leadership roles as teachers, students, doctors, judges, business and community leaders, and politicians. The United States government is wholeheartedly committed to the full participation of women in all aspects of Afghan society, not just in Kabul, but in every province."

In commemorating the opening of the newly constructed National Women's Dormitory and the Women's Teacher Training Institute, the First Lady said, "It is said that big things have small beginnings. Two years ago, the teacher training institute was just a dream. ...And from today's small beginnings we expect the Institute will yield great things."



State Department photo

One of the Institute's programs is the Afghan Literacy Initiative, an accelerated literacy, math, and life skills curriculum for remote rural communities, where many girls still do not have access to schools. Another program is Learning for Life, a health-focused course that is designed to help reduce maternal and child mortality. This program addresses two critical needs for Afghan women: literacy and healthcare. It will help people learn to read with materials

that are focused on health. The Women's Teacher Training Institute is a public-private partnership and will continue to require the assistance of the Ministry of Education, private donors, non-governmental organizations, and the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

The First Lady also announced the establishment of the American University of Afghanistan, with a more than \$15 million multi-year commitment, and the development of the International School of Afghanistan. The school will provide Afghan children from kindergarten through high school with a classical curriculum.

These three projects, Mrs. Bush concluded in her remarks, "are all part of an overall commitment by President Bush to Afghan education....and signify the bond between the American and Afghan people."

IN THIS ISSUE

SPRING-SUMMER 2005

U.S. First Lady Visits Afghanistan

Afghan Women Have Come a Long Way

Landscaping Adventure in Afghanistan

International Women's Day is More Than Just a Day

Business Women at Tunis Summit

See page two story about U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.



State Department photo

Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky (right front) and Governor of Bamyaan Province, Habiba Sarabi (left front) surrounded by U.S.-Afghan Women's Council delegates at the Council Meeting in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 29, 2005.

U.S.-Afghan Women's Council Says Afghan Women Have Come a Long Way

Afghan women have made amazing progress in the last year. This was the major observation of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council about their visit March 29-31, 2005, to Afghanistan. On March 29, the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Abdullah, and the Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal, hosted the sixth biannual U.S.-Afghan Women's Council meeting in Kabul. The Council's American Co-chair, Under Secretary for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, said that the meeting was one of the most successful ever.

The Council, initiated in January 2002 by U.S. President George Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, meets twice annually, alternating between Washington, D.C., and Kabul. It is the only public/private institution devoted exclusively to advance women's basic rights in Afghanistan. The Council seeks to identify Afghan women's needs through consultations with Afghans and first-hand assessment trips. The Council then sponsors solutions by tapping private contributions and channeling U.S. government assistance funding.

On this latest visit, the Council again focused on education and access to health care, but Afghan women are quick to point out that access to jobs is an overarching goal for all Afghan women, too. "Last year, Afghan officials were talking about widow's community bakeries and cottage cooperatives for selling handicrafts," said Charlotte Ponticelli, the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State. "This year they spoke about women-owned construction companies

and beauty parlor chains, and careers for women in the agricultural sector and computer service companies." The Council hosted a round-table with representatives of about thirty women's business associations to talk about challenges and opportunities for women in business. One woman has become the most sought-after kite maker in Kabul. Another woman, thanks to a micro-loan, purchased her first cow and now sells milk to a local ice cream store.

Afghan women are a credit to the country, said Foreign Minister Abdullah at the Council's opening session. The elections were an historic landmark and the women of Afghanistan played a crucial role. "Progress," he added, "has been made by the great Afghan women in all walks of life, even while challenges remain." Last year girls were back at school at all levels in record numbers, but this year Afghans are concerned with the quality of education, the curriculum, and teacher training.

Minister Jalal commented that women are considered equal in the Constitution, but that local courts need to be educated and new laws implemented so women are treated equally to men in the legal system. The Council met with 16 Afghan women judges and lawyers who are working on legal reform and implementation of the new Constitution, which guarantees equal protection for women. Many of these judges received training in Vermont and Washington, D.C. in a program organized last summer by the International Association of Women Judges with funding from a Council member and contributions from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement at the Department of State.

The Council was pleased to announce that two U.S. corporations, Microsoft and Dell Computers, donated computers, printers, and software to the International Association of Women Judges and the Teacher Training Institute. On March 30 in Kabul, First Lady Laura Bush thanked the donors, noting, "This is just one more example of the American peoples' commitment to the success of the people of Afghanistan."



State Department photo

Co-chairs of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky (left), Afghan Foreign Minister, Abdullah Abdullah (center), and Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal.

As in all countries, women look to the private sector for opportunity. The U.S.-Afghan Women's Council visited a U.S.-funded computer-training center where women are being trained to be computer engineers. One student commented that six months earlier she had never seen a computer. Another project combined carpentry classes for women with literacy classes. Fifteen Afghan women entrepreneurs attended an advanced intensive business training seminar at the Thunderbird University's Garvin School of International Management in Phoenix, Arizona, under Council auspices. One of the participants, Kamela Sediqi, saw many women entering traditionally female lines of work, like tailoring. So she launched herself into Afghanistan's newest growth industry: construction. She also founded a consultancy business and has trained 500 men and women from Kabul to Herat in basic business skills and community development.

The Council's overarching goal is to help Afghan women secure political rights and economic opportunity, but these two pillars must be supported by a strong foundation of education and health. The Council show-cased three new education initiatives, the Women's Teacher Training Institute, the opening of a U.S.-style high school, and the inauguration of an American University in Kabul. U.S. First Lady Laura Bush said, "the lack of literacy hobbles all progress for women, legal awareness, economic and political empowerment, even life expectancy. Educating women is especially urgent leading up to the Fall 2005 parliamentary elections."



Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky (right front), and Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal (left front), Co-chairs of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, with participants at the Council meeting in Kabul, Afghanistan on March 29, 2005.

State Department photo

Landscaping Adventure in Afghanistan: an American Volunteer

Nancy Jo Walker, a landscape manager for the City of Dothan, Alabama, wanted to help Afghan women after she saw on TV how they wanted jobs. Though a mutual friend, a call came, "Can you come to Kabul and help teach poor women how to garden?" The answer, without hesitation, was "yes."

In June 2004, Ms. Walker packed her bags and went to Kabul. She worked under the direction of a Canadian volunteer, who felt that if the women knew how to garden better they could feed themselves and even sell produce and flowers at the market. Their plant laboratory was the National Women's Garden.

Ms. Walker wrote: "It was a very exciting trip, and the women there really blessed me with their kindness and eagerness to learn. They would carry hand held buckets of water to each plant never losing a precious drop. It only rains about 11 inches a year in the winter. I trained them in pruning, planting, and the proper way to water. They struggled with the vegetables but had great success with their roses. I tried to teach them the importance of drinking water while working out in the hot sun. When we took our break, we would eat eggs and cookies and of course drink the wonderful tea.

With their election that was coming up in the fall, they had many questions about voting. They could not believe that I had voted since I was 18 and that I could vote in every election. Each one was looking forward to casting their first vote. They wanted to know all about American women, our lives, family, and the important issue of an education. Most of the women that I met could not read or write very well, but they all wanted to learn. Those who could read tutored the others. School started while I was

there. All the kids were running and laughing and were so happy to be going to school, especially the girls.

These wonderful and kind women, who were so grateful that I had come to their city from so far away just to help them, stole my heart. They are my friends for life, and I look forward to going back soon. I feel if one block is beautified and productive, a neighborhood will follow, and then the country will take pride."



Photos: Courtesy Nancy Jo Walker

Alabama native Nancy Jo Walker in Kabul teaching gardening.

International Women's Day is More than Just a Day at State

The Department marked Women's History Month by hosting the First Lady and Muslim women leaders for a conference on International Women's Day, by sponsoring the travel of Afghan and Iraqi delegations to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and by organizing more than 35 events throughout the month of March.

On March 8, First Lady Laura Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky welcomed 250 women leaders, non-government organization partners, and members of the diplomatic corps to a celebration of International Women's Day in the Benjamin Franklin Room, where the First Lady delivered remarks to underscore the President's commitment to promoting women in democracy.

In her address, she emphasized that, "Democratic societies welcome the free exchange of ideas and information. They encourage vigorous debate. They foster education and exploration, and they allow people to grow intellectually and professionally, without limits. American women stand in solidarity with women around the world." She applauded especially the women of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories on their elections. These elections, she said, "will have far-reaching consequences," and will embolden

men and women in other parts of the Middle East to demand the right to vote.

The First Lady, the Secretary, and the Under Secretary then met privately with women leaders from 15 Muslim countries to hear the challenges they face, and to identify areas where the United States can support their work to promote women in the broader Middle East.

The day continued with a briefing at the Foreign Press Center, featuring the Afghan and Iraqi Ministers of Women's Affairs, and Under Secretary Dobriansky. Minister Jalal told reporters, "Afghan women are working now in governmental organizations and in non-governmental organizations. They can move around freely; they are appearing in public demonstrations, in public gatherings, in meetings." But, she added, "we need to have continued expressions of solidarity from you, and most of all, we need continued and concrete help to realize our potential to play an active role at all levels of society for meaningful change." Minister Jalal repeated her message that "Afghanistan is on the road to recovery, but needs solid support from the West," at all her appearances in Washington, D.C.

Minister Othman had a similar message of courage and determination. She noted, "(Iraq's) election was remarkable. Over 2,352 women were candidates out of a total of



White House photo by Susan Steiner

U.S. First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary Rice at International Women's Day event.

7,202. And in a first in Iraqi history, despite the threat of bombs, Iraqis voted...The next step in this historic process will be writing our constitution." She acknowledged that "some in Iraq would like to limit women's rights... We (Iraqis) will succeed through human power and a belief in democracy (that) is much stronger than all kinds of threats... We need to change the culture," she said, "cultural change is not easy." She praised the Department's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative, announced last year on International Women's Day, for providing critical training at exactly the right time and for having a positive impact on the January 2005 elections.

International Women's Day concluded with a USAID-hosted reception at the Reagan Building in honor of the women of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the tsunami-affected countries, to celebrate the role women are playing in the political, economic, social, and physical reconstruction of those countries.



U.S. President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush meet Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal (far right), and Iraqi Minister of Women's Affairs, Narmin Othman (second from left) at the White House.

Secretary Rice and Ministers Jalal and Othman delivered remarks.

This spectacular day was the centerpiece of Women's History Month, but not the only celebration. The Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues arranged for delegations of Iraqi and Afghan women leaders to attend the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which opened on February 28 at the United Nations in New York. In New York, delegates networked with international counterparts, and met private sector groups interested in supporting their work. The delegations then spent a week in Washington, D.C., to participate in the March 8 events and to meet Administration officials, members of Congress, and the media.

They also enjoyed useful consultations on political advocacy courtesy of some valued partners, to include the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, the Afghan Embassy, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Heritage Foundation, and other groups and supporters of Iraqi and Afghan women. On March 9th,

the First Lady and President Bush welcomed the Afghan and Iraqi Ministers for Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal and Narmin Othman, to the Oval Office for a brief meeting.

See our web site for full texts of public statements at www.state.gov/g/wi.



U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Andrew Natsios presents a check for \$2.5 million to the Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Massouda Jalal, on March 11, 2005, in Washington, D.C., with Afghan Ambassador Said Tayeb Jawad (far left) and Under Secretary Dobriansky (far right). Mr. Natsios said the grant would further USAID's commitment to assist the Ministry in its work to improve the status and lives of women in Afghanistan. USAID has provided more than \$50 million to support Afghan women. Photo courtesy USAID.

Under Secretary Dobriansky Champions Middle Eastern and North African Business Women at Tunis Summit

Under Secretary of Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky was the keynote speaker at the Middle East and North Africa Business Women's Summit in Tunis, May 24 to 26. The Summit drew 200 women from 16 countries and territories from the Middle East and North Africa, and American counterparts, to Tunis, Tunisia, for a dynamic program to spur broader women's participation



Iraqi women voting January 30, 2005.

in the economic reform and development of the region. The Summit is a public-private partnership of the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) with the Beyster Institute of the Rady School of Management, the University of California at San Diego; and Women Entrepreneurs, Inc. (WE-Inc.), a leading, nationwide U.S. businesswomen's association based in Washington, D.C.

Thanks to MEPI, the United States is helping to create opportunities to remove some of the barriers that keep women in the broader Middle East and North Africa from realizing their potential. Under Secretary Dobriansky told the women, "We hope to give you the practical skills you need to advance your business careers, but we also hope to use this conference to encourage your leadership as agents for change... in breaking down barriers to women's full participation in economic decision-making... The economic sphere is closely connected with the political and the social order. Through your success as business women, you will also have an impact in these other sectors."

The Summit program included seminars on marketing, personnel management, and raising capital. It also featured a resource bank where women could showcase their own businesses and business associations and establish cross-cultural ties. In side meetings, a small group began discussing the foundations of an intraregional business women's association to advance economic reform, development, and women's status.

Women working together can build the kind of partnerships and business ties that can most effectively meet their cultural and societal needs. The Middle East and North Africa Business Women's Summit gave women a space to carve out their own vision for a brighter, more secure, and prosperous future.



Under Secretary Dobriansky with participants of the Business Women's Summit in Tunis, Tunisia, May 24, 2005.

OFFICE OF THE SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

U.S. Department of State
1800 G. Street, N.W. Suite 2135
Washington, DC 20006
www.state.gov/g/wi
202-312-9675

EDITOR: Susan Crais Hovanec
Department of State Publication 11263
Released June 2005
Bureau of Public Affairs