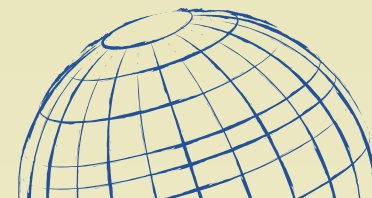


INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES NEWSLETTER



First Lady Laura Bush Addresses 8th Session of U.S. Afghan Women's Council, Reaffirms Commitment to Education for Women and Girls



White House photo

First Lady Laura Bush meets with members of U.S. Afghan Women's Council in July. Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky (to left of First Lady) is Co-Chair of Council.

The U.S.-Afghan Women's Council gathered at the State Department in Washington on July 5, 2006, for its eighth biannual meeting. As Chair of the meeting, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky welcomed First Lady Laura Bush and newly-appointed Afghan Foreign Minister, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta. The Council was established by Presidents Bush and Karzai in 2002 in an effort to strengthen partnerships between U.S. and Afghan public and private sectors, and create political, economic, health, and educational opportunities for Afghan women. The Council has been successful in helping women to improve their social status through increasing their access to economic and educational opportunities. Council initiatives have also produced concrete projects that empower women and advance their overall contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction

and democratic development. In the last five years, women ran for public office and secured 27.3% of seats in the lower house of Parliament in the 2005 election, utilized microcredit loans from community banks to finance their small businesses, and established non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

In her address to Council members, the First Lady—an honorary member of the Council and active supporter of the Council's education initiatives—highlighted the Women's Teacher Training Institute at Kabul University. The Institute, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has trained more than 380 women teachers, providing them with a dormitory, or "safe space," to live in while studying at the University. Participants who complete the course serve as teacher trainers themselves, reaching out to counterparts in

their hometowns and provinces to share modern teaching methodologies that have, to date, benefited more than 10,000 female students throughout the country.

Mrs. Bush also announced plans to convene a conference on global literacy this fall during the United Nations General Assembly session in New York. In her view, this is a key opportunity for Department of State, Department of Education, USAID, and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to come together with member states to "talk about what we can all do to make sure...that children and adults are literate in their countries."

Foreign Minister Spanta pledged his commitment to the women of Afghanistan and vowed to work with the Council to keep women's issues "on the table." Dr. Spanta was accompanied by

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White House photo



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First Lady Laura Bush meets with members of U.S. Afghan Women's Council. To the left of the First Lady are Dr. Paula Dobriansky Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs and co-Chair of the U.S. Afghan Women's Council, and James Kunder Assistant Administrator for the Near East and Asia USAID; to the right is Dina Habib Powell, Deputy Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs and Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs during the eighth meeting of the U.S. Afghan Women's Council at the State Department, Wednesday, July 5, 2006

Ambassador Said Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S., and by three senior representatives -from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Khaled Zekriya, Assistant Secretary for the Americas Political Department; Zohra Rasekh, Director of Human Rights and Women's Affairs; and Hazrat Wahriz, a member of the Ministry's Center for Strategic Studies. Ambassador Jawad discussed the work of Ayenda, the Afghan Children Initiative, on behalf of his wife, Shamim Jawad, and Council member Tim McBride. The Afghan delegation also included Mariam Nawabi, Senior Advisor to the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce and Strategic and Business Development Director for Afghanistan Market Development.

The Council fields projects in four key areas: education; health; economic empowerment; and political participation and legal training. In the area of education, USAID's Jim Kunder discussed a "foundation program" for the American University Kabul, and the recent enrollment of 200 primary and secondary-level students in the first international school of Afghanistan. In addition, Kunder announced that USAID had completed its 17 women's resource centers across the country.

On health initiatives, Ky Luu of the International Medical Corps, and Carolyn Firestone joined their efforts and created a community dental worker's program. Dr. Peter Saleh of

the Afghan Reachback Office discussed the Council's new burn awareness program and assistance for combating human trafficking in Afghanistan.

Among her efforts to increase women's economic empowerment, Mariam Nawabi reported a \$1.5 million "DesignWorks" Business Development and Resource Center project. The Center will be self-sustaining within 3 years and is aimed at supporting workers and entrepreneurs in the textile, furniture, and jewelry industries in certain regions of Afghanistan.

In the crucial area of strengthening women's political participation and legal training,

Diana Rowan discussed the importance of parliamentary training and the initiative that her organization has undertaken to train Afghan judges.

With a variety of projects underway and new initiatives in the works, the members of the U.S. Afghan Women's Council are looking ahead to their next meetings in Kabul and Washington.



U.S. Agency for International Development

Afghan women and girls back in school

The U.S.-Afghan Women's Council welcomes private sector assistance in achieving its mission through contributions to a Gift Fund established by the U.S. Department of State. By donating, you will promote public/private partnerships between the United States and Afghanistan that will mobilize resources to aid Afghan women in acquiring the skills and education they need to play their rightful role in Afghan society. A gift supporting the Council will help Afghans stabilize and reconstruct their country and spread the goodwill of the American people. For more information visit the website: www.state.gov/g/wi/57232.htm

Public-Private Partnerships the Theme at Fifth Iraq Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group Meeting



Lucent Technologies

Members of Iraqi Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group, Marie Royce of Lucent Technologies and Marleine Davis of the National US-Arab Chamber of Commerce, meet with Iraqi delegates to the US-Arab Economic Forum and members of the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at Lucent Technologies.

The Iraq Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group held its fifth meeting on July 25 at the Washington, DC offices of Kirkland and Ellis, LLP. Sponsored by the Department of State and the United States Institute of Peace, the working group focuses on connecting private sector and civil society organizations to help empower Iraqi women, for example, by providing financial support or business training that will enable them to grow and improve their businesses. Some 36 people attended, representing the private

sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the U.S. government.

The July 25 meeting focused on forging public private partnerships to help Iraqi women entrepreneurs gain access to training, training materials, credit, mentoring, and venues to sell their goods. Participants established two subgroups to work on creating access to online business training in Arabic, and to develop an Adopt an Entrepreneur Program, a one-on-one mentoring program in which U.S. women business owners will partner with Iraqi women entrepreneurs to provide micro-loans and mentoring. One participant volunteered to donate training materials,

another expressed interest in providing outlets to sell Iraqi women's products, and yet another participant volunteered to explore the prospect of setting up credit unions in Iraq in cooperation with the National Association of Credit Unions. The working group will also create a review committee that will evaluate proposals for projects and a rapid response fund to support projects that empower Iraqi women.

Ambassador Steven E. Steiner, Acting Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State, emphasized the need for private

sector funding for training for Iraqi women and for production and translation of training materials. Working group participants discussed some key challenges facing Iraqi women in business, such as the need to find sales outlets for their products and assistance with shipping. In terms of next steps, working group participants will be exploring ways to contribute funding, training, and goods, as well as develop worthy proposals for consideration by the advisory committee before the next meeting.

A guest speaker at the July session was Ky Luu, Vice President of International

Medical Corps (IMC). He spoke about IMC's work on the ground in Iraq. IMC is a "front line" emergency relief and development organization that came into Iraq in March of 2003. Mr. Luu attributed IMC's success to their efforts to reach out to and to employ Iraqis. The IMC team in Iraq is primarily composed of Iraqis. Since 2003, the emergency situation in Iraq has led IMC to focus on rebuilding the much-damaged national health system, most importantly the primary health care system. One of IMC's primary projects in Iraq has been the training of, and curriculum development for, Iraqi nurses.

Iraqi Businesswomen Build Skills, Make Contacts During Training Program in Washington DC

Working together with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad under the auspices of the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative, the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues sponsored a delegation of dynamic Iraqi women leaders active in business associations and the economic sector of Iraq to participate in an international economic forum in the U.S. in June. The delegation of Iraqi business women and entrepreneurs selected for the program received targeted business training they will use to assist and empower other women in Iraq.

The women spent the first week of their visit in Washington, where they participated in a week of intensive training at a number of governmental, international, and private sector organizations, including the World Bank, the National Endowment for Democracy, the United States Institute of Peace, the Small Business Administration, the International Finance Corporation, and Lucent Technologies. The Washington program provided the Iraqis delegation with skills training and networking opportunities that will help them serve as multipliers to increase the economic empowerment of Iraqi women. Highlights of the program included such topics as negotiation and conflict resolution, corporate social responsibility, grant writing, developing a media campaign, basic contracting skills, using online tools to develop marketing skills, and constructing a foundation for entrepreneurial success.

Several recurring themes emerged in conversations with the Iraqi businesswomen during their stay in Washington. They repeatedly raised the need for micro-finance in Iraq as a means to generate economic opportunity and growth. They

also emphasized the need for vendors willing to sell Iraqi women's handicrafts, and for funding to provide farmers with the basic tools, fertilizer and seeds necessary to prevent them from abandoning their farms. The Iraqi women expressed enthusiasm for creating a website that would link Iraqi businesswomen with American businesswomen, thus allowing them to network and share ideas.

Complementing their business training, the Iraqi women also had the opportunity to gain insight into the U.S. political and legislative process. They visited Capitol Hill to meet members of the Iraqi Women's Caucus, including Representatives Kay Granger (R-TX), Tom Osborne (R-NE), Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), Judy Biggert (R-IL), Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), and Susan Davis (D-CA). They also met with Iraq's Ambassador to the United States, Samir Shakir Mahmood Sumaida'ie.

Following their week in Washington, the delegation continued on to Houston to take part in the U.S.-Arab Economic Forum, from June 26 to 28, before returning home to Iraq.

Since the delegation's return to Iraq, the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues continues to work with them, and with their Iraqi colleagues, identifying potential handicraft vendors and sources of micro-credit, and



Ambassador Steven E. Steiner, Acting Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues (third from left) and Deborah Emmert, Program Director for the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative (first on left) lead program for Iraqi business women in June, meet with Ambassador Sumaida'ie, Iraqi Ambassador to the United States (center). Kathryn Kargman (second from right) and Bonnie Daley (far right) from the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues also participated in the event.

seeking to connect worthy proposals with funding through the U.S. Iraqi Women's Gift Fund.

The U.S. Iraqi Women's Gift Fund, established by the U.S. Department of State, finances projects aimed at supporting educational programs in areas such as political participation, human rights education, small business development, job skills training, media skills and literacy. Contributions are especially appreciated since funds can be immediately applied towards the most pressing needs. For more information visit the website:
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/57337.pdf>

Reducing Maternal Mortality

On July 12, the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues hosted a round table at the U.S. Department of State on the issue of child marriage. The round table featured expert presentations by representatives of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and other non-governmental organizations from several African countries, and brought attention to the various repercussions of child marriage. One of the most critical repercussions is the increase in maternal mortality. According to ICRW, girls younger than 15 are 5 times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s, and pregnancy is the leading cause of death worldwide for women ages 15 to 19. Rates of child marriage are highest in West Africa, South Asia, and East and Central Africa. In these countries, approximately 30 percent or more of girls aged 15–19 are already married.

Worldwide approximately 529,000 women die each year from maternal causes, and for every woman that dies, 20 more suffer injuries, infection and disabilities in pregnancy or childbirth. In child marriages, factors such as underdeveloped physiology and lack of information and access to services heighten these risks. In many instances, maternal deaths are the result of lack of access to health care in developing countries.

Reducing maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015 is a United Nation's Millennium Development Goal. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world and are far from achieving this goal. South Asian countries such as India and Nepal have nearly 540 and 740 maternal deaths, respectively, for every 100,000 live births, in contrast to ten maternal deaths in industrialized countries such as Japan. Afghanistan's maternal mortality ratio is among the highest in the world. The situation is worse in Afghanistan's rural areas, such as Badakhshan in the northeast, where 6,500 women die for every 100,000 babies born.

Leading causes of maternal mortality include the lack of access to basic health services, assistance from skilled birth attendants, information about pregnancy complications, as well as malnutrition and illiteracy. In many developing countries rural and remote villages provide little or no prenatal care or skilled birth attendants. Weak infrastructure and limited transportation further hamper rural women's access to medical care. In addition, certain socio-cultural practices and biases against women affect their access to care.

The U.S. government is committed to reducing maternal mortality and has undertaken initiatives with the private sector and non-governmental organizations to address some of the leading causes of this threat to women's health including child marriage. For example, in 2004, the US-Afghan Women's Council (USAWC), chaired by Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky, contributed an initial \$5 million to the Rural Expansion of Afghanistan's Community-based Healthcare (REACH) program, a large program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) which provides basic health care services in rural areas of Afghanistan. The contribution supports the Learning for Life Program which teaches basic literacy skills to women using health-related content. The women are then poised to work as community health care providers. These skills allow for meaningful employment for the women. At the same time, the program helps fill a critical shortage of female health care providers. Thus far, 8000 women and girls have received this literacy training. REACH has trained 6300 community health workers. The training takes place in the Women's Centers established across the country by USAID, with a focus on those rural provinces that have the highest rates of maternal mortality – Ghazni, Baghlan, and Badakhshan. REACH has also increased the number of skilled midwives. At the fall of the Taliban in 2002, there were less than 500 midwives in the country. By 2006, the REACH program will have trained more than 800 women as midwives and helped them organize into a national midwives association.

While U.S. government and other international efforts are helping to ameliorate the underlying causes, as well as educating women about maternal health, much more remains to be done for a lasting solution. By working closely with national governments of countries with high maternal mortality rates, the U.S. government is highlighting the need to improve maternal



Afghan mothers and children gaining improved access to healthcare

U.S. Agency for International Development

health, promote sustainable health policies, and mobilize local communities' involvement in solving their own health services' problems. Because women are the primary caretakers of their families and key members of their communities, maternal health affects all members of society. First Lady of the United States Laura Bush said, "it is imperative...for all of us to make sure health care issues for women and children are the best they can possibly be." Improving women's health goes hand in hand with strengthening women's overall political, economic, and social empowerment.

OFFICE OF THE SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

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