



International Women's Issues Newsletter

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Secretary Rice with the International Women of Courage Honorees. (Dept. of State Photo)

Secretary Rice Honors 10 Women with the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award

"Women of courage are standing up for freedom and human dignity, and the United States stands with them. We must not forget that the advance of women's rights and the advance of human liberty go hand in hand."

—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

On March 7, 2007, in celebration of International Women's Day, the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, along with the Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, honored 10 women from across the globe with the Secretary of State's Award for International Women of Courage. The Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues created the first award to honor emerging women leaders worldwide and offer a unique opportunity to focus

on transformational diplomacy in the field of international women's issues. These ten women were chosen out of a group of more than 80 women nominated by U.S. Embassies across the world for their contributions to freedom, peace, justice and equality. The award recognizes these women for the exceptional courage and leadership each has shown in advocating for women's rights and advancement in their societies.

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Dr. Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs, stands with International Women of Courage honoree, Dr. Samia Al Amoudi.

International Women of Courage Honoree

In Her Own Words: Dr. Samia Al Amoudi

My journey with breast cancer started the day I felt a lump in my right breast and was then diagnosed with advanced stage breast cancer. This was on April 12, 2006 which, by the way, is my birthday! Since then I have felt that this is a message from God and my illness is meant to be for a good reason. As a doctor, a woman, a writer for newspapers and as a human being, I felt it was my duty and responsibility to go public with this battle against breast cancer and break the silence. This was of particular importance in Saudi Arabia where 70-80 percent of our breast cancer cases are diagnosed in the late stages compared with only 15-20 percent in the U.S. Even more serious is the fact that 30 percent of our patients are less than 40 years old, compared with only seven percent in the U.S.

In closed societies such as ours, cancer is taboo, a stigma to some, and there are a lot of misconceptions about the disease and treatment – especially chemotherapy. These are the reasons why I decided to go public. I use my weekly column to write a series of articles about my story, have been interviewed on many TV channels and present a weekly program called “Messages of Love.” I was determined to raise public awareness, break the silence and help empower women to know about their own health. Now, after one year, I feel that the first step in this battle is to reach a world free of breast cancer, not only for me, but also for my little daughter Esraa – and every other daughter in this world.

The honorees originate from Afghanistan, Argentina, Indonesia, Iraq, Latvia, Maldives, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe. The women have been true pioneers in making a difference for women in their countries. The honorees come from diverse fields, such as, law, politics, education, human rights, journalism, business and science. Some of the women have become founders of organizations that speak out against injustices faced by women. For example, Ms. Jennifer Louise Williams of Zimbabwe is the founder of “WOZA” (Women of Zimbabwe Arise); the group actively protests government abuses in Zimbabwe. Other women have used their professional background to seek legal changes in their country. Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia of Indonesia, was part of a team of experts that produced a Counter Legal Draft of Indonesia’s Islamic legal code, with recommendations including prohibiting child marriage and allowing interfaith marriage. There are also honorees that have used their medical knowledge to help improve the status of women’s health in their country. Dr. Samia Al-Amoudi of Saudi Arabia did just that; after diagnosing herself with breast cancer, she devoted herself to creating awareness and advocating for medical care to treat breast cancer. This topic was taboo in Saudi Arabia before Dr. Al-Amoudi broke the silence and educated the public about the disease. These are only a few of the amazing achievements brought to light by these ten women.

The Secretary also honored the achievements of four courageous women from Afghanistan and Iraq. Mary Akrami of Afghanistan is being recognized for her work as the Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Center, which is a women’s shelter in Kabul. It is the only women’s shelter in Kabul that offers comprehensive assistance and allows women to stay for longer periods of time. Under Ms. Akrami’s leadership, several women at the shelter have made the virtually unprecedented move of denouncing their abusers publicly and filing charges against them. Ms. Aziza Siddiqui, another Afghan, is the Women’s Rights Coordinator with Action Aid, an Afghan NGO. Through this organization, she educates women throughout rural Afghanistan about

their rights and conducts research on the situations rural women are facing. One of the honorees from Iraq, Ms. Shatha Abdul Razzak Abbousi, is a member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives and also sits on the Human Rights Committee. The other honoree from Iraq, Dr. Sundus Abbas, is the Executive Director of the Women’s Leadership Institute in Baghdad. Through her organization and her activism for women’s rights, Dr. Abbas works tirelessly to improve the capacity of Iraqi women in the Iraqi political process. These women are taking some of the first steps in their countries to empower women in the face of difficulties and hardships that most cannot imagine.

The Secretary’s International Women of Courage Award publicly acknowledges the important advances these women are making. Secretary Rice acknowledged in her remarks on International Women’s Day, March 7, 2007, “We know that in many countries women’s journey for equal rights and equal opportunity is not an easy one. It was not easy for women of our country, either. In fact, it took more than 130 years before America’s founding promise that all men are created equal was also a promise that women could vote, too.”

Achieving the United States’ mission of advancing democracy, prosperity and security worldwide is not possible without the empowerment of women. If women cannot participate in the political process, there can be no real democracy. If women are deprived of economic opportunity, development is crippled. If women are not educated, they cannot pass knowledge to their children and there is no true security for the next generation. The Secretary of State’s Award for International Women of Courage supports this important mission.



USAID Photo: Iraqi women practice their computer skills.

U.S. - Iraqi Businesswomen's Partnership Launched

Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula J. Dobriansky is pleased to announce the establishment of the U.S.-Iraqi Businesswomen's Partnership (USIBP), which will bring American women entrepreneurs together with Iraqi counterparts in a virtual mentoring program through December 2007.

The USIBP, administered by the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, consists of a series of consecutive, six-month business mentoring partnerships between Iraqi and American women. The pilot program of approximately ten U.S.-Iraqi partnerships will include the exchange of insights and advice on business development. Each partnership will engage in bi-monthly e-mail exchanges on topics such as business planning, leadership, management, marketing, and finance. A group website has been established to facilitate communication and the sharing of training materials.

The Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues (IWI) has worked with a steering committee of U.S. women's business associations and civil

society partners from the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative to design and implement the USIBP.

Private industry partners include: Margaret Barton, President of the National Women's Business Council; Karen Kerrigan, President and CEO of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council; Wendy Baumann, President of the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation; Katherine H. Hoelscher, Assistant State Director of the Florida Small Business Development Center; and Julie Lenzer Kirk, award-winning entrepreneur. In addition to developing the program, these business leaders reached out to identify and include American partners for the first of the six-month programs.

NGO partners include Dr. Pary Karadaghi of Kurdish Human Rights Watch, and Zainab Al Suwajj of the American Islamic Congress. They provided valuable input reaching out to Iraqi women for inclusion in the program. Other organizations, both in the United States and in Iraq, were consulted for assistance in identifying Iraqi businesswomen and entrepreneurs.

Improved Maternal Care and Infant Mortality Rates in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health and the World Bank have publicly cited preliminary findings of a Johns Hopkins University (JHU) household survey that the proportion of Afghan women receiving antenatal care was 30 percent in 2006, up from 5 percent in 2003. This independent evaluation also found that the proportion of pregnant women who were attended by a skilled health worker increased five percent to nearly 19 percent. In addition, infant mortality rates declined from an estimated 165 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to about 135 per 1,000 in 2006. This development means that 40,000 fewer infants are dying each year compared to the years of Taliban rule.

The John Hopkins University assessment - which surveyed more than 600 health facilities each year since 2004 and used a Balance Score Card (BSC) to measure different aspects of quality of services - found improvements in virtually all aspects of care in almost every province.

The Ministry of Public Health continues to try to improve the quality of health care for women in Afghanistan. Among other steps, the Ministry is increasing the number of health care facilities with female staff, strengthening and expanding community midwifery education training courses, establishing maternity homes and training and deploying community health workers (CHWs) to deliver basic health services, as well as to encourage and educate women about using health services. Among other services, CHWs provide ORS for rehydration of patients, dress wounds, and detect and refer TB cases in the 13 Afghan provinces USAID supports for improvement of health delivery. USAID has trained over 6500 CHWs for the 13 USAID provinces - 53% of which are women. This is over 50% of the CHWs in entire country. CHWs are volunteers; the dropout rate is less than 3% annually.



Dept. of State Photo: Participants of the Conference of Women Leaders in Science, Technology and Engineering, in Kuwait.

Promoting Women in Science, Technology, and Engineering

Science and technology have created innovations in all areas of society, particularly public health, environment, communication and transportation. As society becomes more dependent on science and technology it is important for the workforce to have the necessary skills to increase its competitiveness in the global economy. Science and technology (S&T) careers provide higher incomes than many other jobs, thereby increasing a woman's equality and autonomy – no society can realize its full potential when half of population lacks influence. Although the number of science and engineering bachelor's degrees awarded to women has increased every year since 1966, women continue to earn less than men. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women with at least a High School Diploma earn 0.76 to every dollar a man earns, and those with a bachelor's degree or higher earn 0.74 to every dollar.

The Office of the Senior Coordinator recognizes the important role of women in science and technology and in the last several months has taken part in planning several conferences regarding women in science, technology and engineering. The first conference took place from January 8-10, 2007. Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky co-hosted the Conference of Women Leaders in Science, Technology and Engineering,

in Kuwait. The conference was held under the patronage of Kuwaiti Prime Minister H.H. Shaykh Naser Mohammad Al-Sabah, and co-hosted by the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) was the U.S. co-sponsor.

The conference brought together 270 women scientists from the U.S. and 20 Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and provided an opportunity to create and build networks. The women discussed the challenges of being a woman in their respective fields, and had the chance to build their capacity to serve as leaders, innovators, and mentors. The U.S. delegation had a wide variety of speakers including NASA Astronaut Janet Kavandi; Anne Stevens, President and CEO of Carpenter Technology Cooperation; and Wanda Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services, to name a few.

The second event was the Chile Joint Commission Meeting, which took place in Santiago, Chile on May 9-10, 2007, at the Academia Diplomática Andrés Bello. The 20-member U.S. delegation was headed by Claudia A. McMurray, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment and Science, and Ambassador Gabriel Rodriguez G.H.,

who led a 40-member Chilean delegation. The delegations reviewed the status of current scientific and technological cooperative activities between Chile and the United States, and for the first time included a discussion on women in science. Andrea Bottner, Senior Coordinator for the International Women's Issues Office, presented remarks on the status of women in science fields in the U.S. and how we could jointly work together with our Chilean counterparts to address disparities and identify future initiatives for collaboration.

At the request of the International Women's Issues Office a roundtable discussion was organized by the Santiago Embassy and the Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (CONICYT). Twenty Chilean women scientists, and three U.S. government representatives discussed the challenges of being women in S&T and offered suggestions and ideas for overcoming barriers.

Through all of these exchanges women from around the world told us that they feel discriminated against when it comes to advancement in their fields and that finding a balance between home life and work is extremely difficult. The women also feel a lack of mentorship by other women in S&T fields. This anecdotal information supports a National Science Foundation survey of women ADVANCE Awardees (an award recognizing individuals for their work in S&T fields) that found that women said they had difficulties finding an effective balance between work and family as well. They also felt discriminated against, and that they had to work harder to achieve equal amount of status. These women also felt a lack of mentoring.

The U.S. government and the Office of International Women's Issues are committed to increasing the education of women and girls, thereby strengthening democracy and equality. Continued dialogue with women scientists will allow us to build a network of mentors for the up and coming future women scientists.



Department of State: Andrea Bottner, Senior Coordinator of the International Women's Issues Office and members of the Bolivian Family Protection Unit.

Promoting Justice and Access in the Judicial System:

Women's Participation in Police and Peacekeeping Forces

In-Focus: G/IWI Visits Bolivian Family Protection Unit

G/IWI Senior Coordinator Andrea Bottner and AAAS Fellow Penny Rechkemmer recently visited the Family Protection Unit in La Paz, Bolivia on a trip to honor Miriam Campos, with an International Women of Courage Award and to speak about the issue of violence against women. The problem of domestic violence in Bolivia is staggering, with an incidence rate of eight out of 10 women in El Alto, one of the poorest areas of La Paz. The resources of the Family Protection Unit, however, are nowhere near commensurate with the need. When Bottner and Rechkemmer entered the Unit's station office they found two female officers standing behind tables in a bare, dilapidated room with approximately 40 people waiting in line to present their case. With only one jail cell the enforcement and prosecution arm of the Unit is practically non-existent and the Police Colonel said that morale is low among her officers.

From the United States to Bolivia to India, women are expanding their sphere of influence into historically male-dominated professions including police and peacekeeping forces. Shifts in gender dynamics within these countries and others have opened doors for women into the judicial sector, but the benefit of increasing women's participation receives surprisingly little attention. Furthermore, there is little discussion of what role the state should play in increasing the number of women in peacekeeping bodies and police forces.

Benefits of Increasing Female Participation Rates

The benefits of including women in police forces impact into all areas of the justice system and are extended to victims of crime as well as those being prosecuted. Internationally, Transparency International has found that women are less likely to engage in or encourage corruption and there is anecdotal evidence that the presence of a female

officer can discourage abuse of both victims and those charged with crimes both at the scene of the crime and when the individual is being held for trial.

Women police officers can also create a more comfortable environment for women to report crimes committed against them, particularly domestic violence or sexual abuse. Brazil was among the first countries to open a Women's Police Station in 1985 to register and investigate charges of domestic violence, threats, child abuse, sexual assaults and other crimes often perpetrated against women. Now more than 300 women's stations exist in Brazil and at least 10 other Latin American and Asian countries have adopted similar systems. In Brazil these stations have been hailed as a success, because they have highlighted crimes that were previously underreported. In addition to providing a place for women to feel comfortable talking about personal issues, the statistics on violence against women compiled by the women officers brought the severity of the problem in Brazil to light.

The government of Tamil Nadu, India opened the first all-female police station in Chennai, largely in response to complaints that women were not reporting crimes, because of the social stigma of confessing one's family problems to strangers and the threat of rape in male-dominated stations. In India in 2005, there were 295 stations which mainly dealt with domestic violence including dowry-related violence. These stations act as a middle ground between reporting dowry crimes at a local police station, which can increase tension between the women and their families, and seeking help from an NGO that does not have the government's backing.

Many barriers limit women's participation in the judicial system. In situations like Liberia, the United Nations is trying to encourage women to enter the force through a special educational program, but most women are not interested, because of the corrupt reputation of the police force. The goal is for 20 percent of the police force to be women, but reaching 6 percent is currently a struggle.

Department of State Highlight:

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Combats Gender-Based Violence.

DRL has provided \$1.5 million in Human Rights and Democracy Funds (HRDF) to support the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) work to combat gender-based violence in Darfur. The use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war is among the many horrors of the 4-year old conflict in Darfur. Since the conflict began, women and young girls have been raped while fleeing villages and as they forage for firewood outside of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. DRL's HRDF grant to IRC is part of a larger \$16.8 million USG initiative to combat gender-based violence in Darfur. Secretary Rice proposed the initiative after she traveled to Sudan in 2005.

DRL-funded IRC centers currently operate in nine IDP camps scattered across all three Darfur states. The centers provide direct medical and psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence and also work with local communities to conduct outreach to women and girls about the risk of gender-based violence. The centers also provide a safe space within IDP camps for women and girls to come together to feel a sense of community and receive training on skills ranging from literacy to income generation activities.



Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative

Since 2004, the \$14.5 million Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative (Initiative) has been working through NGO partners on the ground in Iraq to build the political and economic capacity of Iraqi women. Administered by the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, programs under the Initiative have trained some 6,000 Iraqi women and have benefited them in several key areas.

The first phase of the Initiative focused on immediate post-regime issues, including training in democracy, leadership, political activism, entrepreneurship, and media skills. It also included the establishment of a Women's Leadership Institute in Baghdad, democracy resource centers in four universities, and political training of female candidates for public office.

While continuing targeted training on the above issues, the second phase of the Initiative also focuses on women's empowerment through economic growth, sustainability of independent women's NGOs, outreach to women in the grassroots, leadership development for young women, and the opening of women's resource centers in Basra and Kirkuk.

The Initiative also oversees the Iraqi Women's Gift Fund, and The Iraqi Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group. Both the Fund and the Working Group seek to utilize public/private partnerships to connect funding with projects that promote the political and economic advancement of Iraqi women and the capacity development of women in civil society.

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