



PHOTO & CAPTION

First Lady Lauds Education Initiative



Photo: Faya Gerwin, U.S. Embassy

The First Lady receives a “Gift for Madam Laura” from a young student of Al-Rahma madrasa, who was wearing an eye-catching hat and dress that had been crafted from leaves.

To kick off her visit to the predominantly Muslim islands of Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania, U.S. First Lady Laura Bush visited a madrasa, or community preschool, whose name, Al-Rahma, means “the blessing.” By naming it this, leaders of the marginalized, 2,800-member farming community sought to express their belief that access to education is a blessing from God.

In welcoming Mrs. Bush, Al-Rahma’s students, teachers and officials thanked the American people for contributing to early childhood education, allowing their children to access education that would otherwise be unavailable. Accompanied by Zanzibar First Lady Shadya Karume, Mrs. Bush enjoyed

watching and interacting with students and was impressed with the educational mobiles hanging from the ceiling.

USAID is the only donor currently funding madrasas in Zanzibar, whose islands are home to a million people. In addition, the USAID-supported Zanzibar Madrasa Resource Center, which funds Al-Rahma and 15 other madrasas on Zanzibar, assists madrasas in training teachers selected from the community and developing active learning tools, management committees and financial and administrative record-keeping methods.

The assistance extends beyond teachers and administrators to include parents and community leaders. Greater community involvement has been a hallmark of Al-Rahma. Leaders successfully maneuvered through Zanzibar’s legal guidelines to acquire the title deed for the school in the name of the community. Recent increases in madrasa enrolment include non-Muslims — evidence that the school has gained acceptance even among the non-Muslim minority.

Mrs. Bush said she was impressed with Al-Rahma’s spirit of community involvement. “Local men and women do their part by getting involved in the school — volunteering their time to repair classrooms, to build playgrounds, or to provide meals.”