



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Mrs. Bush's Remarks at the Kabul Presidential Palace

Kabul Presidential Palace
Kabul, Afghanistan

June 8, 2008
3:40 P.M. (Local)

MRS. BUSH: Thank you so much, Mr. President, and I'm so happy to have this chance to be in Afghanistan today. I will be attending the donors conference in Paris later this week, and so I really wanted to take this opportunity to be here to see how things had changed since I was last here and the time before.

This is my third trip to Afghanistan, and it's a pleasure to be back. This was the first time I got to visit Bamiyan, and I had a really wonderful time with the Governor there, Governor Sarabi, who is Afghanistan's only female governor. And she showed me some of her region's most promising projects. I saw firsthand the results of international collaboration in Afghanistan because when I landed, I landed and met the New Zealand PRT, the New Zealand provincial reconstruction team that are there, that are located there in Bamiyan. They gave me a special welcome with -- a special New Zealand welcome that was very interesting and a lot of fun.

Here at the Presidential Palace, I met with students from Kabul University, the Women's Teacher Training Institute, the American University of Afghanistan, and the International School of Kabul. And some of these students are here with us today.

Afghanistan's students are their very best hope for being able to build a strong democracy. And the good news is, the students who are here today told me that they plan to use their education to help rebuild their country and to help their own families and their own communities.

The United States is proud to support 16 universities in Afghanistan, including the American University of Afghanistan. In 2005, a USAID grant helped launch this private independent institution, which opened its doors in 2006. Just two years later, it's enrolled more than 300 students, and it offers courses in business, information technology, computer science, and the liberal arts.

I'm pleased to announce that USAID will sustain its support of this institution with an additional \$40 million over the next five years. This funding will enable the university to offer new courses, provide scholarships, and continue the development of its campus.

From computer sciences to basic skills, education is the key to empowering the men, the women, and the children of Afghanistan. This morning I met students who will benefit from the new Ayenda Foundation's new learning center in Bamiyan, which will give 128 of Bamiyan's most disadvantaged

children a nurturing environment in which to live and study. Ayenda is an initiative of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, which was established by President Bush and President Karzai in 2002.

The Council is mobilizing public and private sector resources to empower Afghan women. It's implemented more than 30 initiatives, totaling around \$70 million, in areas ranging from economic empowerment and political participation to education and health.

I met today with women participating in the Council's ARZU project. Through this initiative, women are given access to education and health care as they earn money by selling hand-crafted rugs. We actually have two of them at the White House, and one custom-made rug that the President and I bought from ARZU for our ranch.

Another Council project that's close to my heart is the Women's Teacher Training Institute. I announced the establishment of the Institute in 2003, and saw its good work when I visited here in 2005. It's provided women from the provinces a safe place to live while they're learning valuable skills. Many of its former students are now leading their own efforts to educate women, men and youth throughout Afghanistan.

The Afghan Ministry of Education's National Literacy Center is carrying forward the Institute's progress in literacy education and teacher training. It's leading the Learning for Community Empowerment program, which reaches into Afghanistan's provinces with courses in literacy, as well as job training and financial education.

Today I'm happy to announce that USAID will provide \$40 million over the next five years to support the National Literacy Center and its other efforts. (Applause.) There's some women here from the National Literacy Center, if you can tell.

And these courses are for adults, not just children, but for all the men and women who missed learning how to read because of the years of the war or the Taliban. It gives people a chance now to go back to school and get their literacy skills, and we hope this National Center for Literacy will provide literacy programs all over the country, in every province, so that everyone has the chance to be educated.

The United States is proud to contribute as Afghanistan rebuilds from decades of oppression. Thank you, President Karzai, for your leadership. I look forward to joining you this week when we'll all be in Paris as the international community affirms our support for Afghanistan's new National Development Strategy. Thank you very much, President Karzai. Thank you very much. Thank you all. (Applause.)

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