

FACT SHEET

U.S. COMMITMENT TO WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

"There can be no justice in the world unless every woman has equal rights."

– First Lady Laura Bush
October 10, 2003
at the Conference for the
National Association
of Women Judges,
Washington, D.C.



First Lady Laura Bush greets Afghan teachers at the White House.

White House Photo, 2003

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Since overthrowing the Taliban in 2001, the United States has implemented more than 175 projects for Afghan women to increase women's political participation, build civil society, create economic opportunities, support the education of girls and women, and increase access to health care. As beneficiaries, Afghan women have achieved notable political milestones:

CONSTITUTIONAL LOYA JIRGA: An Afghan Constitutional Loya Jirga, or Council, approved a new Constitution on January 5, 2004 in Kabul. The new constitution affords all citizens of Afghanistan – men and women – equal rights and duties before the law. The new Constitution also reserves seats in the lower house of Parliament for women. Two of the nine members of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and seven of the 35 members of the Constitutional Review Commission are women. Afghan women will have the right to vote and run for office in the Summer 2004 elections. More than 200 women participated in the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga that established the current government.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP: The Cabinet includes two women ministers – the Minister of Women's Affairs and Minister of Health. A woman heads the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Many more women serve in the public and private sectors.

PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN: The Minister of Foreign Affairs has created an Office of Human Rights, Health and Women's Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to monitor women's programs. The Ministry of Commerce set up a department to help women establish their own businesses.



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY



Meeting of the U.S. - Afghan Women's Council in Kabul, Afghanistan on January 8, 2003.

US Department of State Photo, 2003

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTERS: The United States has allocated \$2.5 million for the construction of Women's Resource Centers in 14 provinces throughout Afghanistan, and is building three other provincial centers. The Centers will provide educational and health programs, job skills training and political participation training to women. Through the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, established by Presidents Bush and Karzai in 2002, the United States

is providing \$1 million in educational training at the Centers. The United States supports the establishment of 10 neighborhood-based women's centers in Kabul and nearby towns. Women executives of AOL/Time Warner have raised \$60,000 for the Council's Gift Fund to support a provincial women's resource center in Afghanistan.

ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE: The United States is providing \$15 million for voter registration, and \$8.86 million for elections in Afghanistan, including civic and voter education, focus group research, training for political parties and civic activists. The United States also provided training in political advocacy for women delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003.

HUMAN RIGHTS, ADVOCACY, AND LEADERSHIP

TRAINING: The United States provided \$750,000 to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

MEDIA TRAINING: The United States has provided more than \$500,000 to train women journalists and filmmakers, some of whom produced "Afghanistan Unveiled," a film documentary about abuses against women by the Taliban.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

MICROCREDIT PROJECTS: Microcredit helps women gain self-sufficiency by starting their own businesses. Through a \$10,000 donation to the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council from Daimler-Chrysler, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a non-governmental organization, will establish two village banks in Herat. FINCA expects to assist more than 30,000 clients in Afghanistan over the next 5 years. Other projects provide skills and literacy training for widows and female heads of household; teach women in animal husbandry; train women in tailoring; and teach women to preserve produce and dairy products for local sale; provide technical support to women's carpet and textile projects; and fund bakeries that employ widows and provide subsidized bread to hundreds of thousands of urban poor.

AFGHAN CONSERVATION CORPS: The United States contributed \$1 million to the Afghan Conservation Corps (ACC) to rehabilitate the environment. The ACC employs several hundred women to make nets to protect newly planted tree seedlings.



Afghan women learn sewing skills at a Women's Resource Center.

US Department of State Photo, 2003

EDUCATION



Over 30,000 teacher-training kits have been distributed for primary education.

US Department of State Photo, 2003

BACK-TO-SCHOOL: Nearly 4 million Afghan children are enrolled in school, including more than 1 million girls, many more than at any point in Afghanistan's history. Since 2001, the United States has dedicated \$144 million for primary education, to construct schools, to train teachers and to provide books and supplies.

LITERACY PROGRAMS: The United States is supporting a host of literacy programs for women in Dari, Pashto, English and mathematics. Nine public libraries in eight provinces are participating in a campaign for women's literacy.

TEACHER TRAINING: Since March 2002, the United States, through partners such as the University of Nebraska, has provided 25.6 million textbooks and 30,000 teacher-training kits for primary education, and trained 3,107 teachers in four provinces. Also included are literacy programs and water supply and sanitation, benefiting 50,000 women and 56,500 children and youth.

HEALTH CARE

The United States has financed health care programs in Afghanistan totaling more than \$58 million, with \$50 million forthcoming over the next 2 years. These programs include the construction of women's wings in hospitals and dormitories for women medical students; curriculum development for health care workers; and maternal and child health, family planning, and nutrition. The United States has rebuilt 140 health clinics and facilities, and will rebuild 400 more over the next three years. We have provided basic health services to more than 2.5 million people in 21 provinces; 90% of the recipients are women and children.

These fact sheets are available online at U.S. Department of State, Office of International Women's Issues. (<http://www.state.gov/g/wi/>). Please check periodically for updates.



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USAID Photo, 2003

The Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues serves, in Secretary Powell's words, as the "focal point within the Bush Administration for the development and implementation of our pro-women foreign policy agenda." Working closely with the Department's regional and functional bureaus and with AID, the Office coordinates the relevant policies and programs. The Office's mandate also includes cooperative efforts with other government agencies, the White House, numerous NGOs, and foreign government representatives.

The Office promotes global U.S. policy on behalf of women's human rights through diplomatic initiatives, public diplomacy, international exchanges and similar projects, and training programs for Foreign Service Officers and other key personnel. It also seeks to establish practical partnerships with international institutions and with the private sector. In all of these ways, the Office plays a lead role in advancing the respect for women that President Bush has declared a "non-negotiable demand of human dignity" supported by the United States around the world.



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