First Lady Laura Bush Leads Global Battle Against Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer among women in the world. Incidence and mortality rates remain highest in developed countries, with the United States having the highest rates. In 2008, the American Cancer Society estimates 180,500 new diagnosed cases in the United States. Although the number of cases in the U.S. remains high, the number of women dying from breast cancer has declined significantly. Eighty percent of breast cancers in American women are diagnosed at earlier stages (stage I or II), because of greater awareness and mammography screening. The 5-year survival rate for women diagnosed with early stages of breast cancer is currently 92% (American Cancer Society).

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 1.2 million people will be diagnosed with breast cancer each year worldwide. Now with early detection such as mammography, the treatment options are greater, meaning a better survival rate. However, the cost and the stigmatization of breast cancer further prevent women from seeking life-saving treatment and diagnostic testing. About 70 percent of breast cancer cases in the Middle East have advanced to stage III or IV (locally advanced or spread to other areas of the body) by the time women see a doctor.

Recently, the State Department created the Middle East Partnership Initiative’s Breast Cancer Awareness and Research Project, which First Lady Laura Bush helped launch last year. The Partnership seeks to help launch early detection such programs and projects for breast cancer awareness and research.

Colombia’s International Woman of Courage Takes Flight Against Terrorism

Andrea Bottnier recently visited Colombia where she sponsored Captain Erika Pedraza Mangiuli, Embassy Bogota’s nominee for the Secretary of State’s 2008 International Women of Courage award. Captain Pedraza serves as a UH-60 “Blackhawk” pilot with the ARAVI (Air de Aviation) for DIRAN (Colombia’s Anti-Narcotics Police). In the world of counter-narcotics and counterterrorism, Captain Pedraza faces danger on a daily basis. She has also overcome many hurdles in this traditionally male-dominated field, as a woman and a single mother.

As a valuable member of the ARAVI team, the “air wing” of the Colombian National Police, Captain Pedraza directly supports counter-narcotics and counterterrorism missions. ARAVI helicopters serve primarily as transport and eradication escorts. They are also involved in interdiction operations, provide in-country transportation of individuals extradited to the U.S. and are used in some counter-terrorism operations.

While in Colombia, Ms. Bottnier flew on a mission with Captain Pedraza to witness some of her daily challenges.
Supporting Women Peace Builders in Iraq

The 18th Global Summit of Women was held in Hanoi, Vietnam, from June 5–7, 2008. The delegation, consisting of nine U.S. women leaders in business and government, was led by U.S. Treasurer Anna Escobedo Cabral. The Summit explored Asia-Pacific economies in the global marketplace and gathered women entrepreneurs, Fortune 500 executives, and high-ranking government officials to discuss the advancement of women in business and government. Over 900 local and foreign delegates from 70 countries attended.

As a member of the U.S. delegation, Andrea Bottrier, Director, Office of International Women’s Issues, addressed participants on gender-based violence issues, specifically the U.S. response to Trafficking in Persons.

Many in Vietnam viewed the Global Summit of Women as an opportunity to raise awareness of important women’s issues. While in Vietnam, Ms. Bottrier visited a domestic violence hotline and shelter facilities, and spoke to government officials and NGO representatives about the most difficult part of addressing domestic violence—changing cultural attitudes. She also shared the U.S.-based coordinated community response model in which everyone in a community—advocates, police, health professionals, lawyers, judges, etc.—understands the problem and plays a role in crafting the solution.

During her visit to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in June 2008, Ms. Bottrier highlighted progress made and discussed ongoing challenges related to domestic violence in Vietnam. In meetings with government officials, the Vietnamese Women’s Union, as well as local and international non-governmental organizations and media, Ms. Bottrier praised the passage of two pieces of positive legislation impacting women, the 2006 Law on Gender Equality and the 2007 Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

Ms. Bottrier emphasized the importance of education in tacking gender-based violence. She stated, “Women need to be educated that violence and discrimination against them are unacceptable.” She stressed that authorities and the media play key roles in raising the awareness of both men and women on this issue.

Multimillion Dollar Initiative Boosts Empowerment of Iraqi Women

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice with Farhiyo Farah Ibrahimi of Somalia, a 2008 International Women of Courage awardee.

Farhiyo Farah Ibrahimi was one of eight recipients of the 2008 Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage Award. Recognized for her work in the Dadaab refugee camp, Farhiyo faced strong opposition from her highly conservative and patriarchal society as she promoted an end to female genital mutilation (FGM), better treatment for rape victims and more secondary education for Somali girls.

The Dadaab camp’s isolation in and north-east Kenya means exposure to the outside world is extremely limited and life is especially harsh for women, who have traditionally played a subordinate role to men in conservative Somali society. The only African winner among the 2008 honorees, Farhiyo carried on with her advocacy in the face of ostracism. She believes her community should be supporting—rather than stigmatizing—rape victims, single mothers, divorcees and widows.

Dadaab is the only world Farhiyo knows. This makes her views on female empowerment—and her willingness to fight for women’s rights—all the more remarkable. Her most challenging role has been as a campaigner for the elimination of FGM, also known as Female Circumcision (FC), Female Genital Cutting (FGC), and Female Genital Surgeries (FGS). These include a range of practices varying from a simple nick of the clitoris to the partial or complete removal and infibulation of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Those who practice FGM believe that a circumcised woman will attract a favorable dowry.

Today, an estimated 70 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM in 28 countries in Africa and Egypt. Unfortunately, medical complications often occur, such as sepseimia, pelvic inflammatory disease, and other numerous long and short term health effects. Farhiyo works to inform families and women of these complications, and continues to fight against this practice.

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The official U.S. Delegation to the 2008 Global Summit of Women in Hanoi, Vietnam from left to right (Back row) Shinae Chun, Susan Au Allen, Lady Green, Leanna Brown, Summit participants, and Sandy Lindeberry. (Front row) Yvonne Boice, Amy Blyth, Andrea Bottner, and U.S. Treasurer Anna Escobedo Cabral.

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq, the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad were instrumental in selecting qualified candidates.

The training will include sessions on conflict resolution facilitation, leadership, messaging, and how to engage men in peace-building initiatives. This training program is part of a five point plan developed by G/IWI to increase women’s inclusion in U.S. Government sponsored peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization initiatives.

The program’s mission is to provide capacity-building training for Iraqi women peace builders who are interested in improving the impact and effectiveness of existing peace-building efforts. The goal is to create a network of women peace-builders in Iraq by facilitating a dialogue with peace-builders who have successfully implemented grassroots initiatives in other conflict countries.

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Members of the Multi-party Women’s Caucus work together to develop regional work plans to further advocacy initiatives.

Empowering Iraqi women is a U.S. foreign policy priority of the Bush Administration. Through a variety of programs, the U.S. is building Iraq’s women’s participation in the political process to create a strong, sustainable civil society. These programs comprise a long-term strategy, designed to give Iraqi women the tools they need to build a free society.

Since 2004, the Office for International Women’s Issues (G/IWI) has supported Iraqi women through the Iraq Women’s Democracy Initiative (IWDI). A $24.5 million initiative, this competitive grant program builds the capacity of Iraqi women enabling them to participate more fully as political and economic leaders in Iraq.

To date, programs under the IWDI led by U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGO) partners on the ground in Iraq, have trained over 7,000 Iraqi women in several key skill areas, including: leadership, political participation, entrepreneurship, media skills, women’s rights advocacy, coalition building, negotiation, and training on Iraq’s constitutional rights.

G/IWI recently awarded a number of new grants to U.S.-based NGOs working on women’s issues in Iraq. New projects are being developed under several new grant focus areas.

One exciting new focus area is the elimination of violence against women. The project provides legal, social and medical services for victims; improves government responses to gender-based violence and encourages greater awareness of gender issues.

Entrepreneurship and economic capacity building for widows is another new focus area for IWDI. Through this project, 470 widows are being trained to be economically self-sufficient. As a result, disadvantaged Iraqi widows will acquire the skill sets to enhance their understanding of their rights and civic responsibilities.

Another new program area will focus on women and peace-building, and will strengthen the capacity of women and civil society actors in the Tameem governorate to work cooperatively against violence and hate in their communities.

Iraqi women are eager to play an active role in rebuilding their society. With programs such as these, more women will be able to take part in the democratic process and serve as examples for future generations.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FC), also known as Female Circumcision (FC), Female Genital Cutting (FGC), and Female Genital Surgeries (FGS). These include a range of practices varying from a simple nick of the clitoris to the partial or complete removal and infibulation of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Those who practice FGM believe that a circumcised woman will attract a favorable dowry.

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