

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES NEWSLETTER



White House photo by Tina Hager

*President George W. Bush meets with the Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq, Iraqi women and U.S. soldiers in the Oval Office July 19, 2004.*

## Iraqi Women March Toward Elections

There cannot be a complete transition to democracy in Iraq without the full participation of Iraqi women. The U.S. is working with Iraqi women on several fronts to help them secure the opportunities and representation they deserve.

The Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative and the U.S. Iraqi Women's Network launched by the Department of State on International Women's Day, March 8, 2004 is yielding results. The Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, with the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), awarded almost \$10 million in grants to several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in late summer 2004.

These grants will ensure that women in Iraq are full participants in building and leading this new democracy. The Initiative is funding training in political leadership and organization, media and communication skills, public advocacy, and entrepreneurship. Women candidates are being trained to compete and lead in the new National Assembly. Women are being educated on the importance of their vote. A Leadership Institute is being established to serve as a training and resource center. National networks of women's groups are receiving support and counseling on developing women's advocacy strategy for the 2005 elections, the drafting of a new constitution, and a national referendum on the constitution. "Train the trainer" programs are underway to professionalize women in NGOs, media, and academia. Women are being trained in radio broadcasting, and a production facility for radio shows for women, and by women, will be established by the end of 2004.

The U.S. Iraqi Women's Network is busy, too. In late September 2004, the Office of the Senior Coordinator, with support from the International Republican Institute, hosted the visit to Washington, DC of the new Iraqi Minister of State for Women's Issues Narmin Othman and Maysoon Damaluchi, Deputy Minister of Culture. The two ministers gave a briefing at the White House for business and NGO leaders, met with private sector leaders at a lunch hosted by Under Secretary for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, and spoke to more than 20 journalists at the Foreign Press Center on September 27. They met with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and other Congressional aides, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the United States Institute for Peace, and the League of Women Voters on how to get women involved as candidates and to get out the vote. Mrs. Othman said, "The terrorists will not succeed this time. We are determined to win."

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Photo: Barbara Rodley USAID

Ballot box inscription: "A Correct Choice For a Better Future."



Secretary Powell drops by at a September 27th lunch hosted by Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky, in honor of Iraqi Minister of State for Women's Affairs Narmin Othman.

Dr. Khuzai worked to ensure that women were represented in all levels of government, particularly in the transition to democracy. Dr. Khuzai holds degrees in obstetrics and gynecology from the University of London and for several years was director of a hospital in the southern city of Diwaniyah, while teaching at the local medical college. President of the Women's Organization in Diwaniyah, founder of the Women's Health Center in Baghdad and founder of the Widow's Care Organization, Dr. Khuzai has also worked to develop a women's health strategy for post-war Iraq. Dr. Khuzai has seven children and several grandchildren.

At the Foreign Press Center, Under Secretary Dobriansky said Iraqi women are playing a significant role in their country's transition toward democracy. Dobriansky added, "We are very grateful for the dedication of Iraq's women leaders like Ministers Othman and Damaluchi who know better than any of us here that the challenges confronting Iraqi women are not just the political, social and economic structures in Iraq, but traditions, misperceptions and stereotypes."

Charlotte Ponticelli, the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues stressed, "Today in Iraq, despite the obvious security problems, there is indeed a momentum for democracy that cannot be stopped." On November 15-16, 2004, the Senior Coordinator hosted Iraqi Interim National Council member, Dr. Raja Khuzai. Dr. Khuzai's message was straightforward and inspirational: Despite external and internal threats, Iraqi women will secure their basic rights. She reminded everyone she met that a few courageous Iraqi women guaranteed a political role for women through an amendment in the Transitional Administrative Law which requires a 25% female membership in the Parliament (see Spring-Summer 2004 Newsletter). On November 16, Dr. Khuzai said, "I have been threatened...I never feel scared. This is my belief: Iraqis want elections, the first step toward democracy. Despite the challenge, we will participate, especially women. We will succeed, no matter what. We only grow braver."

Dr. Raja Khuzai is a member of the Interim National Council (INC), which assumed responsibility for governing Iraq in June 2004, and a founding member of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). As a member of the IGC,



State Department Photo

## Afghan Women Gain Suffrage and Vote for a President

By Charlotte Ponticelli, Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues

On October 9, 2004 millions of Afghan women, and men, exercised their right to vote for their President in Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election. Women comprised some 41% of the more than 8.2 million voters. A woman ran for President! This remarkable milestone, only two and a half years after liberation from decades of oppression, speaks to Afghan enthusiasm for democracy.

Women from all over the country, from Herat, Bamyan, Gardez, Ghazni, Paktia, Jalalabad, Khost, everywhere—voted. One Afghan housewife said, "These elections are very good for women. For the first time, women are having a say in the future of Afghanistan. We are fed up with war." And the men cooperated. At the same polling station, official election observers saw many men in minivans and cars delivering women to the polling center. An elder from Shwak, southeast of Gardez, exclaimed, "I've brought every woman I could fit into this car."

Masooda Jalal, the woman candidate, first exercised her political voice at the Emergency Loya Jirga in 2002. She was grateful for the intensive political training she had received through a U.S. funded non-government organization and ran a good 2004 campaign.



AP/Wide World Photo by Elizabeth Dalziel

Afghan woman votes for President October 9, 2004.

A woman activist said of Jalal, "she is the only candidate who has been able to achieve a personal relation with voters." Analysts doubted Jalal's chance to win, but nobody doubts her integrity and earnestness as the doctor who stayed and worked despite the peril.

Afghan women are unstoppable. As First Lady Laura Bush said on October 6, 2004 at the 2004 Fortune Most Powerful Women's Summit in California, "the struggle for women's rights is a story of ordinary women doing extraordinary things. And today the women of Afghanistan are writing a new chapter in their history." On nearly every front, they are breaking new ground.

Beyond securing their rights, Afghan women are demanding jobs and access to the commercial sector. They will never be locked up

and starving again. With help from the U.S. and other coalition countries, they are now engaged in all kinds of work, from constructing concrete blocks, to making delicate knots on exquisite export-quality rugs in an employee-owned cooperative. Afghan women are studying business, working as journalists and judges, and running for President and the Parliament.

An equally important need is access to health care. Every 20 minutes an Afghan woman dies in childbirth. Reducing maternal mortality is a priority, along with education for women, and is key to improving women's lives. For this reason, Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky initiated a Health Advisory Committee on June 15, 2004 at the White House on the occasion of the fifth meeting of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. The Council discussed several issues, but health care and jobs were top of the list.

President Bush, President Karzai, Secretary Powell, National Security Advisor Rice, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Thompson met with the group of Afghans and Americans who attended this formal Council meeting. First Lady Laura Bush honored the Council with a lunch. More than 20 Afghan women attended the events, including four Afghan Fulbright scholars (a U.S. Department of State educational exchange program), four Afghan women judges on a Council training project, and 12 U.S. Department of Agriculture Cochran Fellows in the United States for a program for job training in agribusiness.

On July 26, 2004 the Council's Health Advisory Committee sponsored a special session to discuss health issues and to foster public/private partnerships to target capacity with needs. Under Secretary Dobriansky hosted the organizing meeting for the committee that Margaret Spellings, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, will chair.

On the education front, the Women's Teacher Training Institute, another Council initiative, became a reality last summer as well. In cooperation with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Afghan Literacy Initiative, the Institute is training teachers to teach basic literacy to Afghan women in rural areas of Afghanistan.

Access to the media as an instrument for human rights and voter education and political participation for women is also on the Council's agenda. Under Secretary Dobriansky hosted members of the Council for a lunch on November 30 in honor of Afghan video filmmaker, Shakeba Adil. Ms. Adil talked about her newest film, "If I Stand Up" that documents Afghan women's role in the elections. Adil explained, "If I stand up, and you stand up, a whole village and then a nation will stand up for women's rights." Ms. Adil, who also worked on the film "Afghanistan Unveiled," was in Washington, DC as a guest of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) to attend a December 1 screening of this film and a reception hosted by PBS CEO and President Patricia Mitchell. Ms. Mitchell is a member of the Council. PBS broadcast the film throughout November. "Afghanistan Unveiled" was made with funding from the Department of State and the USAID. The people of Afghanistan still face many challenges in strengthening their young democracy. But Afghan women are making great progress in exercising their newfound freedoms.

*Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky (far left) hosts Afghan film maker Shakeba Adil (second from left), Afghan Ambassador to the U.S. Said Tayeb Jawad (far right), and Mrs. Jawad (second from right) at a lunch November 30 in the Department of State to celebrate the PBS broadcast of Ms. Adil's film, "Afghanistan Unveiled."*



State Department Photo

## Ellen Sauerbrey Works To Lower Maternal Mortality

As President Bush's Representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey represents the United States in fora that address the social, educational, economic, and political status and concerns of women.

Every year, it is estimated that more than half a million women die during pregnancy or giving birth. Ninety-nine percent of these cases occur in developing countries. Tragically, the number of maternal deaths has remained fairly steady throughout the years. This continuing and unabated loss of life is simply not tolerable because the majority of these maternal deaths is preventable—through increased access to skilled birth attendants, antibiotics, and other currently available technology.

The United States is in the forefront of efforts to raise public awareness of the issue of maternal mortality and is a leader in supporting strategies to lower maternal mortality rates in the developing world. Most recently in October 2004, U.S. Representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey, organized and hosted an expert panel at the UN on maternal mortality. The panel included Dr. Howard Zucker, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Fernando Carbone, former Peruvian Minister of Health, Dr. George Mulcaire-Jones, President and Medical Director of Maternal Life International, and Dr. Kathleen Kurz, Director of Reproductive Health and Nutrition, International Center for Research on Women. The panel focused on Afghanistan, Latin America, Africa, and the link between child marriage and maternal mortality, respectively.

Panel members spoke about the fundamental problems related to maternal mortality, such as lack of comprehensive emergency obstetrical care in the developing world, shortages of basic medicines, vitamins and nutrients, lack of infrastructure and transportation for pregnant women in rural areas, dearth of doctors and skilled health providers, the need for training and education, and the special vulnerability of adolescent mothers. Panelists agreed that key to any successful strategy to save women's lives are education and increased political will on the part of country leaders to make this issue a priority.

An example of a very promising U.S. project is the Afghan Family Health Book, which Dr. Zucker demonstrated during his panel presentation. These "talking books" provide useful and practical information about health practices and hygiene, focusing on health pro-



*Ellen Sauerbrey, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Commission on the Status of Women*

State Department Photo

motion and disease prevention. Twenty thousand books will be distributed via hospitals, clinics, and women's health centers. Tested in Kabul and refugee camps, response to the books has been good. Using creative methods such as the Afghan Family Health Book, vital information on health is being disseminated. In Afghanistan—a country with the second-highest mortality rate in the world—such information will help save women's lives, as well as other family members.

Indeed, it is a fact that when mothers are healthy and informed, the entire family benefits. It is appropriate this year, which marks the Tenth Anniversary of the Year of the Family, for the international community to take the time to look at the tragedy of maternal mortality and focus on efforts that can help mothers give birth to healthy sons and daughters.

Common sense says that strong and supportive families contribute to a successful pregnancy, and community involvement from faith-based and non-governmental organizations is a necessary inclusion for long-term government plans in addressing maternal mortality. The United States will continue to raise this issue in bilateral and multilateral settings, and remains committed to funding education, training and health programs aimed at reducing the rate of maternal mortality.



*Afghan doctor treats a patient.*

USAID Photo

## All Women, All the Time: Cambodia Radio

In Cambodia, Radio Station FM 102 is a station of, by, and for women. According to a 2003 independent survey carried out in seven provinces, some 63% of Cambodians listen to the station that was founded in 1999 on International Women's Day (March 8). The station is a division of the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (a non-governmental organization or NGO). Its 10-kilowatt broadcasts, originating from its headquarters in the capital Phnom Penh and boosted by a 200-watt relay station in Kampong Thom, make it one of the two top independent radio stations in the country, reaching 11 of Cambodia's 20 provinces and 4 municipalities. Since Cambodia has a large illiterate population, radio is an extremely effective method for informing citizens. According to Nancy Yuan, a Vice President of the U.S.-based non-profit The Asia Foundation that funds the station, FM 102's programs are "a key source of education and information on economic, social and political issues."

The Asia Foundation Photo



*Cambodia journalist interviewing Cambodia woman.*

The station is on the air 7 days a week, 15 hours per day, with programming on issues such as women and law, Khmer history, trafficking in persons, HIV/AIDS, violence against women, and poverty. The station also hosts popular call-in shows and offers free time for NGOs operating in Cambodia to talk about their projects.

According to Chea Sundaneth, the Co-Director of the Women's Media Centre, "FM 102

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State Department Photo



*Ellen Sauerbrey in Cote d'Ivoire.*

is the only radio station in Cambodia that is run by women and which specifically targets women especially those in rural and remote communities." Ms. Sundaneth added that having a women's station "is particularly important in Cambodia, where many women are not educated and cannot read or write in their own language. Women often drop out of school "to support their families and to fund the education of their brothers," she explained.

Complimenting FM 102 for its independence and objectivity, Mr. Leu Lay Sreng, the Minister of Rural Development and former Minister of Information, told the Voice of America radio station that "most media institutions in Cambodia are not neutral, except WMC Radio (FM 102)." Ms. Yuan says the station "has strong listener loyalty in an environment where nearly all other broadcast media outlets are one way or another connected to or owned by political parties." The station played an important role in the 2003 national election by encouraging women to vote and making candidates available to women voters through its call-in shows. Ms. Yuan noted that, thanks to these efforts, FM 102 played "a key role in educating people so they could more effectively and responsibly participate in democratic processes."

Other public service programs are The 80% Show that targets 80% of Cambodians who live in rural areas and who need to understand more about the government's decentralization program and a program that highlights an anti-rape campaign, called Toward Point Zero. A third program, the Cool Show, is a call-in show aimed at young listeners aged 18-25. The program focuses on the relationship between HIV/AIDS and sex, and it is the first program of its kind in Cambodia.

The Asia Foundation has been a steady supporter of FM 102 over the years, with significant funding from USAID and the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs that helped launch The 80% Show and Toward Point Zero.

## Women Leaders Speak Out in Cote d'Ivoire

**"I had no intention of running for MP when I attended the training session, but you have made me realize that I have a responsibility to my country and I have decided that I will be a candidate for Parliament in 2005."**

*—Participant in Women Leaders Conference.*

The U.S. Embassy's American Cultural Center, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Coalition of Women Leaders in Cote d'Ivoire sponsored a 4-day training seminar for women leaders in August 2004 with trainers from the U.S. and Rwanda. About 50 women attended the first 3 days of workshops, held in Grand Bassam; the fourth day attracted almost 100 women to the American Cultural Center in the capital, Abidjan. The Coalition of Women Leaders includes women from all political parties who are united around the belief that women's voices are vital to the political process. This dynamic group was the brainchild of Mariam Dao Gabala, local economist, and U.S. Embassy Political Affairs Officer Ergibe Boyd.

Ellen Sauerbrey, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, led the team of trainers that also included Josie Bass, President of ALVA Consortium, and Odette Nyiramilino, a Rwandan Senator and founder of the Coalition of Rwandan Women Leaders. The workshops aimed to inspire more women to run for political office and to give them the skills to do so. Currently, women hold about 10 percent of the seats in the Cote d'Ivoire Parliament. The Coalition hopes to motivate 200 women to run for office in the 2005 elections.

Ambassador Sauerbrey and her team worked to help the participants acquire the nuts and bolts of running for political office—planning a political campaign, fund raising, issue advocacy, leadership and communication skills. The women exchanged ideas on why women need to be involved in politics and the greater challenge of convincing decision makers that creating political, economic, and social opportunities for women benefits all of society.

The event received extensive media coverage, including a BBC interview with Ambassador Sauerbrey. Several national call-in radio programs generated tremendous interest in future training programs on women's political participation and leadership development.