

Dear Friends,

Creating Hope International (CHI) is excited to share with you some of the amazing work accomplished in 2015 through the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), the Tibetan Project and other private programs.

In this newsletter you will learn about the prestigious recognition awarded to AIL's founder, Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, for her extraordinary work in educating and empowering the Afghan people. You will read about AIL's Love and Forgiveness Conferences and the Women's Legal Center. You will hear how Dr. Yacoobi's radio station is affecting Afghan life. And, you will find an update on the Tibetan project.

To support these projects, CHI manages an annual budget of \$1.3 million, funded through grants, contributions from the communities we serve and through individuals like you who believe in our mission to empower grassroots community development through support for quality education, health, social and economic programming.

Our plans for the coming year are many and their scope broad enough to reach thousands more with the message of hope and the promise of a peaceful and prosperous life. Your generous tax-deductible donations are vital to the success of this important work. Please mail your check made payable to Creating Hope International today. Or, donate online by credit card at creatinghope.org or afghaninstituteoflearning.org.

On behalf of all those we serve, we offer our sincere gratitude for your continued financial support.

Creating Hope International

P.O. Box 1058, Dearborn, MI 48121
chi@creatinghope.org
www.creatinghope.org

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Dr. Sakena Yacoobi named 2015 WISE Prize Laureate



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser presents Dr. Sakena Yacoobi with the 2015 WISE Prize for Education Laureate in Doha, Qatar in November.

adverse conditions of war and occupation," said HH Sheikha Moza. "From refugee camps to secret night schools, and often at great personal risk, she established a network of organizations that provide general education as well as public health education. While her work focuses on girls and women, it also benefits boys and men. Millions have benefited from her optimism."

The WISE Prize for Education was established in 2011 by HH Sheikha Moza to recognize outstanding, world-class contributions to education. Candidates are nominated by individuals and institutions with a demonstrable commitment to education and are screened by the WISE Prize for Education Committee. Final selection is made by an international jury of distinguished individuals. The WISE Prize for Education Laureate receives a gold medal and \$500,000.

Dr. Yacoobi received the award before some 2,000 members of the WISE community from diverse fields and over 150 countries.

"I feel honored and blessed to be chosen as this year's WISE Prize for Education Laureate. It is particularly meaningful because this is such a crucial time in Afghanistan. My people live in terror and poverty. They are suffering and feeling hopeless," she said.

"Yet, at this moment a light has appeared. With this Prize, we know that we can continue to educate more and more Afghans, giving them hope and encouraging them to go forward no matter what they are facing. It is such a great gift to me, and I dedicate the Prize to the Afghan Institute of Learning and all of the women, men and children we are educating."

Honors

We are pleased and proud to share the good news that Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, CEO, Afghan Institute of Learning, was named the 2015 WISE Prize for Education Laureate.

The prestigious award was presented by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), during the Opening Plenary Session of the seventh World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha, Qatar on November 4, 2015.

"Our WISE Prize for Education Laureates embody the spirit of WISE. They are tireless advocates for the right to education. This year's Laureate is distinguished by her determination to bring education to her fellow citizens in the most



Dr. Sakena Yacoobi with HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser and First Lady Michelle Obama.

AIL opens first center to provide legal support for indigent women

Justice Work Working with the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Afghan Institute of Learning recently opened the first Women's Legal Center in Herat to provide legal support for indigent women.

Staffed with five experienced, female lawyers in an office near Herat's courts, the Women's Legal Center assists women referred by MOWA and HRC, as well as women who hear about the project on the radio or through other means.

"Thanks to AIL's training in leadership and human rights, Afghan women have become aware of their rights as women and are seeking ways to secure those rights," said Dr. Yacoobi. "However, many women do not have the funds or support to pursue their goals. This center will give them the help they need."

Women with no financial resources are represented for free; others pay as they are able.

Staff lawyers work on a variety of cases affecting women, including child custody battles, protecting property or inheritance rights, and securing justice in cases related to child marriage, marriage without consent of the girl, and abuse.

The lawyers also host regular broadcasts on Radio Meraj to inform women of their rights and the center's services.



Broadcasting hope, changing lives



Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, the deputy governor, Herat government officials, university professors, social activists, journalists and others were on hand for the grand opening of Radio Meraj in July.

Radio Meraj A long-held dream of AIL's founder, Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, came to life last May when Radio Meraj began broadcasting to millions of Afghans in eight districts of Herat City.

Now airing 16 hours a day from AIL's offices, the private radio station offers a variety of scientific, social and cultural programming, along with news and music.

Many families listen in and participate regularly through call-ins to talk shows targeted to teens, housewives and men and women of all ages on topics such as trending social issues, health matters, family success models, human rights, poetry, music and much more.

Listener feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, as the programming resonates with the Afghans' desire for peaceful and prosperous lives.

Samaya, a high-school senior who preferred music stations over talk shows before finding Radio Meraj, wrote to say she is grateful for the educational programming that has awakened her to a new way of thinking.

"I have decided to study harder and to pass the college entrance exam. I have started buying new books and studying with my classmates. I thank Radio Meraj for waking me up," she wrote.

One of the broadcasts made a big difference for a remote village in Herat. A government official was tuned in when Haji Mir, a radio audience listener, called in to express his frustration about the village's lack of drinking water. The official took action and solved the problem.

"We now have enough drinking water in our area," Mir said. "Radio Meraj changed the lives of thousands of people in this far distant village."

Dr. Yacoobi is grateful to those who have made the station possible.

"I am so happy to have the station broadcasting and to see its impact already. It's amazing," she said. "As the security situation in Afghanistan continues to worsen, the station is giving us an important tool to reach people, especially women, who cannot travel to AIL workshops or Learning Centers."

TED Talk Sakena had the privilege of speaking at TEDWomen 2015 in September. Log on to TED.com and search "Sakena Yacoobi" to hear her inspiring message, "How I stopped the Taliban from shutting down my school." In her warm and endearing way, Sakena shares how she stood up in the face of adversity to open schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan and reveals her motivation for continuing her work among the people there.



What the world needs now is love and forgiveness

Dr. Yacoobi calls for more involvement from beneficiaries of humanitarian efforts

Call to Action Dr. Sakena Yacoobi,

was among a handful of honored guests on the panel “Humanitarian Action in 2025: A Forward-Looking Agenda” at the Global Consultation (GloCon) held in Geneva in September.

Glo-Con was the last of a series of meetings held over the past 18 months bringing together some 23,000 stakeholders from more than 151 countries as a lead-up to the United Nation’s World Humanitarian Summit scheduled in 2016.

Dr. Yacoobi’s panel addressed the questions of how to better place people at the heart of humanitarian action, how

to best build people’s resilience to crises and how to better manage future risk.

If each person is treated with respect and listened to, you will be amazed at the results.

In her impassioned reply, Dr. Yacoobi said: “We need to have nations, regions and international organizations at every level

of the process to commit to having at least 50 percent of the planners and implementers from the most vulnerable beneficiaries of aid. And of the total number of people involved, 50 percent must be women and 10 percent youth.”

To illustrate her point, Dr. Yacoobi explained what she did when members of an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan asked her for education.

“I took the time to listen to the people’s concerns, so I was able to identify the silos and find a solution to the problem,” she said. “A year later, 15,000 girls were being educated by AIL-trained teachers. If each person is treated with respect and listened to, you will be amazed at the results.”



Hundreds of people from numerous villages attended the first Afghan Institute of Learning Love and Forgiveness Conference in 2012. Thanks to strong media coverage and discussions that went viral over social media channels, the message went around the world.

Transformational

The theme that gets to the heart of those who participate in AIL’s Love and Forgiveness conferences is this: The world is a better place when people choose love over hate and anger. And, where there is love extended one to another, there is the hope of peace.

Thirteen hundred Afghans, including 740 women, heard this simple, yet profound, message at the 10 Love and Forgiveness conferences held since 2012, and it is shaping the way Afghans see themselves and how they relate to one another.

Participants report being more trusting and positive and less negative toward others. They have established more harmonious relations with their families, neighbors and colleagues. One conference participant was encouraged by the discussion on mutual respect.

“I had not been able to control my anger in my classroom, and I could not give love and forgiveness to my classmates,” she said. “But my mind has changed now. I know I need to consider mutual respect if I want to enjoy living in my community.”

Other participants said they recognized their responsibility in promoting love and forgiveness and were empowered to become leaders who advocate, by example, for an end to hate and fear in Afghan society. Many said they are now more hopeful that Afghanistan can be a peaceful, respectful place to live.

The first Love and Forgiveness Conference held in Herat in 2012 gathered people from seven provinces and many tribes embracing a wide spectrum of Afghan society, including multiple levels of government officials, educators, social activists and university students.

A worldwide audience developed through media coverage from more than a dozen Afghan TV and radio stations and via social media discussions gone viral.

The remarkable success of the conferences underscores the value of AIL’s process of involving the people it serves in planning, implementing and contributing to a project. Each event was skillfully organized and managed by Afghan youth and women from the community who are eager to see the core values of Afghan culture restored.

Exceptional local speakers led workshops on a variety of topics including the value of all human life, mutual respect, listening, trust, sacrifice, sharing, leadership, safety and peace. Traditional Afghan music and the poetry of the beloved Mawlana Rumi provided a moving backdrop for interludes of reflection and sparked an almost immediate sense of unity among participants.

AIL looks forward to holding more conferences in other provinces where the people have requested them and will seek funds to accommodate the need.

“We also want to incorporate this message into the regular school curriculum so children will learn from an early age that their country was not always a place of strife,” said Dr. Yacoobi.

DID YOU KNOW? Since its inception in 1995, AIL has served more than 12 million people through its programs of education, health and teacher training.

Tailoring tools



Art skills



Mobile Literacy



Fast Facts on AIL

Expectant Mother Program –

AIL's three-hour workshops on pre- and post-natal care and safe birth practices are making a huge impact on decreasing the infant and maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan (the highest in the world). Among the 80% of participants who reported after the workshop, there were no infant or maternal deaths and all deliveries were done in a hospital or clinic.

AIL Learning Centers –

AIL's Learning Centers continue to educate young girls and women who are unable to attend public schools. Traditional academics are offered, as well as income-producing classes such as sewing and tailoring.

The centers are also a natural spot for Afghan youth to hang out and share their ideas and desire for the peaceful rebuilding of their country. Classes are offered in miniature painting, calligraphy and other art forms/media to help broaden their education.

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi Private Schools –

In an effort to provide high quality affordable education for young Afghans, Dr. Yacoobi opened four private schools in her own name – two in Kabul and two in Herat. Although many of the 1,290 students receive scholarships through AIL to attend the schools, all four schools are financially self-sufficient.

Mobile Literacy –

With cell phones and text messaging, AIL's Mobile Literacy program is helping young Afghans learn to read and write. Students study literacy materials and respond to questions from teachers sent via text messaging. In only four months, young girls and women who entered the program unable to read the alphabet are now reading at a second to fourth grade level!

Top students and teacher awards

Dr. Yacoobi's vision for a program to encourage Afghan children to excel at learning was realized this year, thanks to the generosity of a long-time supporter of AIL's work.

Students attending the Sakena Yacoobi Private Schools were invited to enter the competition. Those who did were interviewed and then tested in seven subject areas, including English/Computers, Sports, Music/Poetry, Science, Math, Logic and Chemistry. Gold medals were awarded to the top students in each subject and a cash prize and book was given to second place winners.

In addition, special prizes were awarded to three teachers at the school. A gold medal was given to an accomplished teacher of miniature art, and cash prizes were awarded to the painting and tailoring teachers.



Pictured here are some of the students who received awards for their outstanding work and commitment to excellence.

Bon children from Tibet and Nepal study at Menri

Students at the Bon Children's Centers are continuing with their studies, and annual prizes for excellence in academics and sports were recently awarded.

There are 230 students supported by scholarships at the centers, and there is a growing list of students who also need help.

"Bon children are arriving at Menri from the borderlands including Nepal and Tibet and are in immediate need of food, shelter and education," said a Children's Center staff member. "Some boys are placed in the Bon Children's Welfare Center as young monks, and some girls go to the Redna Menling Nunnery as young nuns. Together, they attend the local Central School for Tibetan Children for their general education. After completing their education, they may choose to enter monastic life as young adults, or be trained for vocations in the secular world."

These children are the future of the Bon, and to survive and succeed, they need our help. CHI's financial assistance helps all Menri children by providing resources for clothing, nutrition, healthcare, and educational needs.

