

**CANADIAN WOMEN FOR WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN** / **FEMMES CANADIENNES POUR LES FEMMES EN AFGHANISTAN**

# Afghanistan



A. Raffaele Cirillo

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN**

**A busy month for all our members at CW4Wafghan. This newsletter highlights a number of exciting HEADLINES of interest to our members and supporters:**

**\*\*\*NOTE: MATCHED FUNDING FOR CW4WAFGHAN by CIDA for FEMALE TEACHER TRAINING in 2008...ACT NOW...see article by Linda Middaugh on page 6**

## HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup>

*Belated*

**Women in Business – Creating Intelligent Lives  
Presentation to the Calgary Public Library – March 7, 2008**  
BY CAROLYN REICHER, PRESIDENT, CW4WAFGHAN

Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan partners with small, grassroots non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan with a shared goal of advancing and protecting human rights for Afghan women and girls. Given the devastated condition of Afghanistan – its physical infrastructure, its health care and education systems, its judicial system, police force, communication channels – it's natural to look at how the lives of Afghan women have changed over the past 10 years that Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan have been active in that country.

One of the striking things about the women of Afghanistan is the way in which their nature stands in stark contrast to what the western world knows of them. When you think of a woman in Afghanistan, what do you think of? A burqa... A veil... Poverty... Helplessness... Abuse... Perhaps you think of the characters in the book, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It is true that Afghan women have been VERY long suffering, but they are NOT just a nameless, faceless entity, shrouded in misery. My experience of Afghan women is one of strength, resilience, courage, hope and solidarity. Change for the better is happening in Afghanistan because of the women. Children are fed because of the women. Education is achieved because of the women. Health care and hygiene become priorities because of the women. Most importantly, human rights are discussed, promoted and respected because of the women. The women of Afghanistan are working hard to shape their own lives. Did you know that in Afghanistan, International Women's Day is not just one day? It is an entire week of celebration, and when you are there during that week, men approach you and say, "I wish you congratulations on your International Women's Day!" Not to pick on our own men, but when was the last time your husband, father, brother or son wished you congratulations on IWD?

The women in Afghanistan are making a difference in their lives because they know the rebuilding of their country rests largely on their shoulders. Yes, there are international security forces there, such as our own Canadian military. They are working diligently to promote stability and security. There are also a



While I recognized very early on in my involvement with Afghan women that they had such strength and ability to change their world, what I wasn't prepared for was the way in which the lives of our own Canadian volunteers would change – sometimes radically – by their involvement in women's human rights.

lot of international development agencies working tirelessly to support the development of the country and its people. However, in the everyday ways that count – cooking the meals, making or mending the clothing, getting the children to school, seeking medical support, going to market, earning an extra wage, cleaning the home, supporting the relatives, volunteering to rebuild the community – it is primarily the women who are doing that work. Hmmmm.... Does that sound familiar?? In January this year, Dr. Sima Samar, head of

No newspapers. No television. No jobs or schooling. Forbidden even to walk down the street alone.

As Janice Eisenhower wakes this morning to International Women's Day, she will no doubt be thinking about the ongoing plight of women in Afghanistan.

"I spent my childhood out in nature, encouraged to explore the world," says the 56-year-old native Calgarian. "A girl in Afghanistan could only dream of such a day."

During the past few years, the world itself has awakened to the unjust treatment of women under Afghanistan's Taliban. Since 9/11, we've all heard the horror stories of the extremist regime's bans on everything from cosmetics and high-heeled shoes to women laughing out loud in public.

The international bestselling novel *The Kite Runner*, later made into a film, also introduced millions to the Taliban's unimaginable human-rights violations. And of course, we're regularly reminded of the ongoing crisis when young Canadian soldiers heading off to Afghanistan cite defending the rights of women and girls among their main objectives.

But this incredible Calgarian was ahead of the curve -- way, way ahead.

More than a decade ago, she started out on a journey that would touch the lives of women on the other side of the planet and transform her own life in the process.

As a co-founder of the Calgary-based, national organization Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan ([www.w4wafghan.ca](http://www.w4wafghan.ca)), Eisenhower has been at the forefront of an internationally recognized effort to better the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan through health and education.

Partnering with women's organizations in Afghanistan, the CWFWA's 14 chapters across the country raise funds and further awareness of Afghan women's struggles through a variety of endeavours.

Earlier this week, the grassroots organization was in the national news when the federal minister for international cooperation, Beverley Oda, approved its proposal for a \$600,000, two-year teacher-training project in Afghanistan.

I must state an up front bias here: 17 years ago, I shared an office space with Eisenhower, who was then working as an assistant for an environmental consulting firm. I fondly remembered her as a kind, compassionate and highly principled woman.

So it's an honour Friday morning to find myself at her home office, in Calgary's inner-city Bankview district, here to celebrate her achievements of the past decade -- although it's not all that surprising to learn Eisenhower found a way to meld her efficient work ethic with a passion for justice.

But she's the first to admit she's something of a late bloomer in life. She gave birth to son Daniel in her early 40s; and it wasn't until he was a preschooler that she honed in on what would become her life's vocation.

"I guess like so many others, I took my freedoms for granted," she says, noting her younger days were spent skiing and hiking in the Rockies, travelling the world and sampling a wide variety of university and college courses. "I always knew I was on this journey for something else, but I didn't know what it was or how I could make a difference."

In 1997, while studying for her degree in international development studies at the University of Calgary, she stumbled upon an article in *Homemaker's* magazine by Sally

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# Government of Canada Recognizes Canadian Grassroots Efforts with Support for Afghan Women and Girls

PRESS RELEASE FROM GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:  
March 6, 2008

OTTAWA — THE HONOURABLE BEVERLEY J. ODA, MINISTER OF International Cooperation, announced today that the Government of Canada is taking new action to reduce discrimination against women and children in Afghanistan and encourage their participation in Afghan society.

Minister Oda announced two initiatives at an event hosted by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), on the occasion of International Women's Week, to recognize the efforts of Canadian organizations and individuals that are helping improve the lives of Afghan women and girls.

"Women in Afghanistan suffered tremendous hardship under the Taliban regime. They lost the right to a formal education, to being part of the workforce and to participating in political life," said Minister Oda. "Canada is proud to help Afghan women overcome this legacy and is honoured to highlight some of the important work being done by Canadians, such as Alaina Podmorow, to help improve the lives of Afghan women and girls."



As part of today's announcement, the Government will provide \$5 million to the Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women, a Canadian International Development Agency fund to support quick-impact projects aimed at reducing discrimination against women and encourage their participation in Afghan society. The new capacity that this funding provides will help address the recommendation in the report of the Independent Panel on Canada's role in Afghanistan for "locally managed, quick action projects that bring immediate improvement to everyday life for Afghans."

The Government will also provide \$500,000 to the Excel-rate Education initiative being undertaken by the Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, (CW4WA) a volunteer network in Canada committed to supporting the empowerment of Afghan women and girls. This project will establish a teacher-training program, through local

partners, to improve education for Afghan girls in Kabul Province. The funding will permit the training of 720 Afghan teachers, including 364 female teachers.

In addition, CIDA will match, dollar for dollar, funds raised by CW4WA, and their affiliated youth organization, Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan, to bring the number of female teachers trained to 500.

Two years ago, Miss Podmorow, an 11-year old girl from Okanagan, B.C., founded the organization called Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan (LW4LW). This group is an extension of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Through fundraising efforts, LW4LW was able to pay for the salaries of thirty Afghan schoolteachers for one year, at a cost of \$750 per teacher. In addition to raising funds, Miss Podmorow's organization is committed to raising awareness among North American girls and their parents about the issues faced by girls in Afghanistan.

Today's announcement is part of Canada's overall \$1.3 billion contribution to development in Afghanistan over 10 years which is aimed at strengthening governance, security and development in the country.

## BACKGROUND:

### Supporting Afghan Women and Girls

After experiencing decades of conflict and discrimination, Afghan women are working hard to assume new roles and responsibilities in their society.

Under the Taliban regime, women were denied access to the workplace, school, political life, and even health care. Today, Afghan women represent 25 percent of the democratically elected National Assembly, more than two million girls are enrolled in school, and the number of Afghan mothers who have access to a skilled childbirth worker has almost quadrupled since 2002.

While these achievements represent important milestones, Afghan women continue to be among the most disadvantaged in the world, especially in measures of health, poverty, exposure to violence, deprivation of rights to property and/or forced marriage, and education and literacy.

In an effort to help address such gaps, Minister Oda announced on March 6, 2008, that Canada will contribute \$5 million towards the Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women and \$500,000 to Excel-rate Education, an Afghan teacher training initiative.

### Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women

The creation of the Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women will equip CIDA with a local, field-managed,

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the Independent Afghan Human Rights Commission, was in Calgary to speak to the public about human rights for women in Afghanistan. The person introducing her was award winning journalist, Sally Armstrong. As Sally introduced Dr. Samar, she told stories of the amazing commitment this woman has made to the women of Afghanistan and how she fights to bring justice for everyday Afghan women. She then told us how Dr., Samar (despite her many accolades, and internationally recognized role in supporting women's rights), can also make yogurt from scratch, can alter her own clothing at the drop of a hat, and can host a dinner for 10 (which she has made herself) despite having worked a full day. When Sally expressed amazement at such feats, Dr. Samar replied simply, Well, I am an Afghan woman, after all!" Yes, it's true – Afghan women, despite the challenges they face, through their hard work, resiliency, determination and an unfailing sense of hope and faith, are changing not only their own lives, but the lives of the people in their communities. When I was in Afghanistan, I met woman after woman, from early teens to the elderly, who were following in the footsteps of Dr. Samar and her commitment to change.

While I recognized very early on in my involvement with Afghan women that they had such strength and ability to change their world, what I wasn't prepared for was the way in which the lives of our own Canadian volunteers would change – sometimes radically – by their involvement in women's human rights. Our organization has grown from two women ten years ago, to fourteen chapters across Canada, with hundreds of members and thousands of volunteers. What is very powerful is not the numbers, but the individual stories of these women and how contributing in a volunteer capacity has changed their lives. Partnering with Afghan women in friendship and with a common goal has fundamentally changed the way we see the world and our role in it. We view economics differently. We approach education and life opportunities differently. We consider our investment of time, energy and money differently. We even parent our children differently because of our work with Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. What is at the root of this change in our lives is the fact that we are actively engaged in something about which we are PASSIONATE!

You know, it's funny the assumptions our society has about some things. When you are first introduced to someone – maybe at a cocktail party, or perhaps at your spouse's workplace Christmas party, what is it you normally say after the "Hello, nice to meet you?" It is usually something like, "So, what kind of work do you do?" – as if the job somehow defines the person – as if the activities for which we get paid somehow dictate who we really are as people. And how exciting are those conversations? How far do they get in terms of getting to know the actual person? Are you usually still with that person a half hour or an hour later, still discussing where they work? What they do for a living? Not likely.

What if when we met people, we asked a different kind of question? Two years ago, I attended a fundraising dinner sponsored by a good friend of mine, Frances. Attending the dinner were twenty-seven business-women – very dynamic women – most were entrepreneurs. After my presentation to the group, Frances told us that we were then going to go around the room and introduce ourselves. Well to be honest, I am now chagrined to admit that at the time, I inwardly rolled my eyes and thought, "Oh, we are going to be here forever! Twenty-seven women?? All introducing themselves, one by one?" However, being the very special person she is, Frances gave us specific instructions for our introductions. She said, "I don't want to know where you work, or what you do for a living. I want you to tell the group, what is your PASSION?"

Well, I cannot even begin to describe what an amazing, delightful, and powerful experience this was. Twenty-seven women got up in turn to talk about what got them excited and motivated, what brought them joy and fulfillment,

what made them truly engaged – in their lives, and the lives of their communities. I don't know how long it took us to go through twenty-seven introductions, but I can tell you that NO ONE was looking at her watch. And not only was no one looking to slip out the back door, but after the introductions, women dashed across the floor to connect with one another, exchange phone numbers, suggest ideas and share their passions more fully.

These are women who are no longer willing to simply accept our society's bizarre notion that excessive multi-tasking somehow makes for a meaningful existence or creates real success – either for us as individuals, or in our society. These women know that simply allowing ourselves as modern women to become more and more busy – in our jobs and in our home life is NOT a badge of honour. They know that real fulfillment and balance do not come from simply "doing more" or by adding more and more to our already full plates. Instead, fulfillment and enrichment, true learning and success, come from investing in our passions.

So, why don't we talk about our passions? Why don't we ask people, "What are you passionate about?" You should try it sometime. You might be astounded by the response. Of course, a lot of the time, you get rather an odd look from other people. Yet, some of the time, you will catch a glimpse of what really makes women tick – what entralls them, what excites and motivates them, and what fulfills them as individuals. That is when you will truly see the ways in which as women, we are creating intelligent lives, and changing the world in which we live. Thank you, and Happy International Women's Day.



**Board members:** Carolyn and Janice at IWD Celebrations in Kabul, Mar 8, 2004

# PRIME MINISTER RECOGNIZES CANADIAN WOMEN FOR WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

On March 6th, CIDA paid for our VP, Lauryn and Alaina from LW4LW (plus two others) to fly out to Ottawa from B.C. for this announcement. Our government also approved a large CIDA grant for teacher training to CW4WA and said they would match donations made to CW4WA and LW4LW to increase our project to training 500 female teachers.

So, please help us maximize the government funds being allocated to matching our donations over the next few months. Please consider a donation to CW4WA now. You will get a personal income tax receipt for any amount over \$20. Your cheques should be made out to our sponsor, Rights & Democracy, with CW4WA-teachers on the memo line, and send this to: CW4WA National Office, PO Box 32014 Bankview, Calgary, Alberta T2T 5X6. 100% of your donation will assist teachers in Afghanistan.

You can also make a donation online by VISA/MC with [www.Canadahelps.org](http://www.Canadahelps.org). Put in our sponsor organization: Rights and Democracy - then hit Rights and Democracy again, then under Fund designation, choose: Women for Women Afghanistan.

This is very exciting for all of us as members of CW4WAFghan and its wide network in Canada. I urge you to please act now by making a contribution. And please send this newsletter on to anyone you think would be interested in helping us!

Let's make sure we can assist teachers—working together as Canadians to advance human rights in Afghanistan--to our maximum abilities with this unique opportunity of matched funding from CIDA.

Sincere thanks and Happy International Women's Day!

— LINDA MIDDGAUGH, BOARD MEMBER CW4WAFGHAN AND CHAIR, CANADIANS IN SUPPORT OF AFGHAN WOMEN, OAKVILLE



**Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan and  
Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan  
OTTAWA March 6, 2008  
Celebrating International Women's Day**



**L-R: MP Ron Cannan, Lauryn Oates, Jamie and Alaina Podmorow, Prime Minister Harper, Carolyn Reicher and Minister Bev Oda.**



Armstrong, a journalist who had seen firsthand how women struggled under the Taliban.

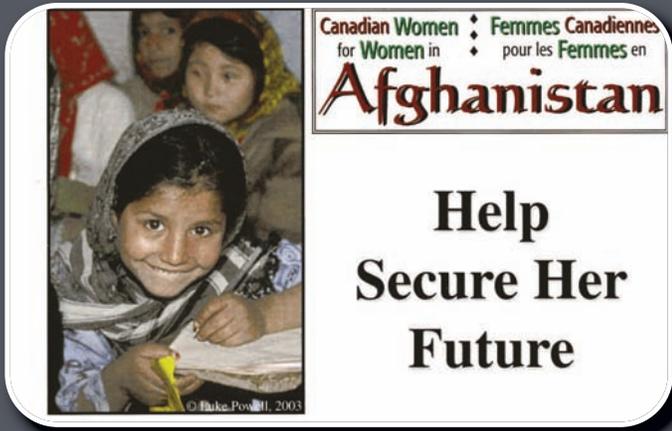
"I just couldn't believe how the women there were being treated," she says, her eyes tearing up from the memory. "It was so powerful, it was my 'Aha!' moment."

She took the article to her classmate and close friend Carolyn Reicher -- and as the old saying goes, the rest is history. Today, Eisenhauer serves as CWFWA's executive director, while Reicher is its president.

Afghan colleagues where she's found the ultimate inspiration.



PARTNERING



Eisenhauer is quick to point out that the pair had much help along the way by several dedicated people, including Armstrong and Deborah Ellis, who first came up with the concept of a Canadian volunteer organization helping Afghan women, but who soon shifted her efforts into supporting CWFWA from the sales of her children's novels, which focus on life in countries like Afghanistan.

"Deborah's books have raised more than \$500,000 for us," says Eisenhauer, who adds that 100 per cent of the proceeds from fundraising go directly to programs aiding Afghan women.

She also credits the men who have helped her along the way, both in Afghanistan and at home. Her husband Richard Roberts, who runs his own public consultation business, has been supportive both emotionally and financially, she says.

"This is 100 per cent volunteer," she says of her full-time commitment to aiding Afghan women. "Richard believes in this as much as I do."

But it has been through relationships with her

"These are some of the most courageous, inspiring women you'll ever meet," says Eisenhauer, who says marching with Afghan women through the streets of Kabul in 2004 is one of her life's highlights.

"Afghan women have taught me about respect. . . . I've learned more from them than I could ever give back."

Before leaving, Eisenhauer hands me a brochure on another of the CWFWA's initiatives, a fundraiser called Breaking Bread for Afghan Women ([www.breakingbreadforwomen.com](http://www.breakingbreadforwomen.com)). The aim is to encourage Canadians to host potluck dinners with friends and family that raise \$750, an annual Afghan teacher's salary.

"Canadians have raised more than \$800,000," says Eisenhauer, who proudly adds that the federal government will now match, dollar-for-dollar, the funds raised by Breaking Bread.

"This is something fun anyone can do," she says. "And the positive impact is so great."

Breaking bread with friends, toasting a Calgarian we can all be proud of, and raising money to educate girls in Afghanistan. Now, there's an idea to chew on this International Women's Day.

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE CALGARY HERALD, 8 MARCH PROFILING OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JANICE EISENHAUER.



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quick-response fund that will help reduce discrimination against women and girls and encourage their participation in Afghan society. The purpose is to support initiatives implemented by Afghan organizations that will enable them to strengthen, accelerate and influence programming and policies that advance women's rights in three primary areas – economic empowerment, access to education, and the legal protection of women's rights.

The anticipated impact of the project will be greater and more equal participation of women and girls in all aspects of life through reduced discrimination, greater development of their human capital, and increased leadership on their part.



### Excel-rate Education: Afghan Teacher Training

The Government of Canada is contributing \$500,000 to the Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (CW4WA), who will establish a teacher-training program through local partners (the Afghan Women's Resource Centre and Arya Training Institute). This initiative will train 720 Afghan teachers (half of which will be women) with a goal to helping improve access to quality education for girls in Kabul Province.

Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan is a volunteer-based organization that was founded in 1996. The group began as a small volunteer network of women in Canada committed to supporting the empowerment of Afghan women and girls, and has grown to fourteen chapters across the country.

Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan is an extension of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Founded two years ago, by 11-year old Alaina Podmorow in Okanagan, B.C., the organization works to find ways to help young women in Afghanistan.

Through their fundraising efforts, Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan was able to pay for the salaries of thirty female schoolteachers for one year, at a cost of \$750 per teacher. In

addition to raising funds, Miss Podmorow's organization is committed to raising awareness among North American girls and their parents of the issues faced by girls in Afghanistan.

The Government of Canada recognizes the central role that women play in achieving sustainable development. The Government of Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), addresses the needs of women by supporting projects that improve maternal and infant health, education, the protection of women's rights, as well as access to the labour market and political life.

Visit CIDA's web site for other examples of CIDA-supported projects that assist Afghan women and girls including:

- The Microfinance Investment Support Facility for



Fatema Tul Zahra Schools funded by CW4WAfghan in a remote area of Kabul and in Maimana City, Faryab Province

Afghanistan (MISFA) which, to date, has provided more than 418,000 Afghans – more than 2/3 of whom are women – with small loans and savings services to help them improve their livelihoods.

- The Aga Khan Foundation's Girls' Education Support Program which provides increased access to quality learning opportunities and promotes secure and supportive learning environments for girls.
- An International Criminal Defence Attorneys Association initiative which provides legal aid services to Afghanistan's most vulnerable groups, including women.
- A Rights and Democracy initiative that promotes legal and policy reforms to improve the status of women.
- UNICEF projects to help address gaps in maternal health services in the southern region of Afghanistan.

A CARE project that responds to the needs of the most vulnerable widows in Kabul.

This information is available at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/NAT-36111441-M38>

# THE WOMEN GO TO OTTAWA

CW4WAfghan members and Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan go to OTTAWA for International Women's Day celebrations:

## PRIME MINISTER HARPER PRAISES CANADIANS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF AFGHAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

March 6, 2008

Ottawa, Ontario

Prime Minister Stephen Harper today praised two Canadians who are making a real difference in the lives of Afghan women and girls. During a meeting in his Parliament Hill office, the Prime Minister thanked the duo for complementing Canada's efforts in the war-torn country.

"I would like to thank these remarkable women for providing hope and support to thousands who were denied basic human rights and brutalized by the Taliban for the simple, heinous reason that they were female," said Prime Minister Harper.

The Prime Minister met with Alaina Podmorow, the 11-year-old founder of Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan, and Lauryn Oates, the vice-president of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. The sister organizations raise funds for health and education programs for women and girls in Afghanistan, and promote human rights for Afghan women.

"Working with our Afghan allies and Canadian aid organizations, Canada is helping to build a secure, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan. It's an honour and a privilege to meet two women who are working to make this endeavour a success," said Prime Minister Harper.



## Calendar Events

**Mar 13:** Calgary Chapter Meeting at St. Matthews United Church main doors 2039 – 26 A Street SW 7:30-9:30pm

**Mar 15:** Military Family Resource Centre: Breaking Bread pot luck dinner in collaboration with CW4WAfghan. Call 244-5625.

**Apr 10:** Calgary Chapter Meeting at St. Matthews United Church main doors 2039 – 26 A Street SW 7:30-9:30pm

**May 8:** Calgary Chapter Meeting at St. Matthews United Church main doors 2039 – 26 A Street SW 7:30-9:30pm

**Jun 12:** Calgary Chapter Meeting Pot Luck Dinner spring windup 6:30-9:30pm, ALL WELCOME, location tbc.

**Jun 15:** Father's Day: Nathan Hornburg Memorial "Loops for the Troops" race. Details to be provided.

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Calgary, Kingston, Montreal, Oakville CSAW,  
Okanagan & LW4LW, Ottawa, Peterborough,  
St.Thomas/London, Vancouver, Victoria,  
Waterloo, Whitehorse, Winnipeg