

**AFGHAN WOMEN LEADER'S PRESS BRIEFING
27 JANUARY 2010**

BIO DETAILS

Mary Akrami, Director of Afghan Women Skills Development Center

Mary Akrami has been the Director of Afghan Women Skills Development Center (AWSDC) since 1999. She set up AWSDC during her exile in Pakistan in order to build the capacity of Afghan women through English and computer literacy classes. In 2001 she represented Afghan Civil Society in Bonn and has since conveyed her experiences of civil society work at numerous international fore, including the World Social Forum in Brazil 2005.

Mary is the director of the organization which established the first women's shelter in Afghanistan. She saw a need for such a shelter when a woman was arrested after being accused of disrespecting her father-in-law. The woman was found innocent, but was afraid to leave the jail for fear of how her family and society would react to the incident. Akrami realized that others like this woman needed a safe place to go. Today the shelter takes in runaways and women released from prison who do not feel safe returning home. Under Mary's leadership, several women at the shelter have made the virtually unprecedented move of denouncing their abusers publicly and filing court cases against them. Notwithstanding threats she has received, she refuses to be intimidated and remains committed to her work.

In celebration of International Women's Day 2007, the U.S. Department of State recognized Mary, along with nine other women, with the Award for International Women of Courage. Miss. Akrami attended a four month scholarship program of Human Rights Advocacy at Colombia University in 2009.

Orzala Ashraf, Founder and Senior Advisor, Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan

Under the Taliban regime Orzala Ashraf launched underground literacy and health education programs for women and girls, often putting herself directly at risk. During the mid 1990s, she served as a guide and translator to journalists and foreign aid visitors to the refugee camps in which she lived, having fled Kabul with her family when she was 12. As a refugee in Pakistan for 14 years, she says her greatest fear was that she would remain illiterate. "With no books," she says, "I read even the wrappers of newspapers. I read everything." In 1999, she founded Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan, which provides free services in education, protection, counseling, health, and child care and promotes income-generating activities for women. Ms. Ashraf has also set up safe houses to help transform "victims" of domestic violence into agents of change. Ms. Ashraf has long been a strong advocate for human rights and the active participation of women in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, consulting with international organizations including Human Rights Watch, Swiss Development Corporation, UNDP, and UNIFEM.

She is a member of the Afghan Women's Network and Civil Society and Human Rights Network, Persian Gender Network, Gender and Law working group (professionals and scholars involved in crafting the constitution), and is one of the founding members of the Women's Political Participation Committee. Ms. Ashraf and her organization were given the Isabel Ferrer Award for women's education and the Amnesty International award for humanitarian aid to children and women; she was a World Fellow at Yale University in 2008.

She has a master's degree from the University of London in development planning, with a special focus on social development practice. Ms. Ashraf will spend the next several years focusing on research and advocacy on governance in conflict zones and how they affect women's lives.

Wazhma Frogh, Gender and Development Specialist and Afghanistan Activist

Wazhma Frogh, the 2009 recipient of International Woman of Courage Award, is currently a Post graduate fellow at University of Warwick in United Kingdom. Prior to this, Frogh was the Afghanistan Country Director for Global Rights, the International Human Rights Law Group. For the past 13 years, Frogh has devoted her life to mobilization for social change to benefit women's rights in Afghanistan, focusing on such issues as women and security, legislative reform, and women's political participation. Recently, she has been actively involved at advocacy and lobbying around development of Afghanistan's Elimination of Violence against Women Law and worked towards amendments of the discriminatory articles of the Shia law proposed and approved by the Afghan government.

She is a leading expert on the issues of gender-based violence and has worked tirelessly on the elimination of violence against women in Afghanistan. Since 2001, Frogh has worked with over 100 CSOs around Afghanistan on human rights, and development projects particularly for women and girls. Frogh also has vast specialized training and experience in gender and peace building in Afghanistan. She has participated in the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University and the Law and Leadership Program at George Washington University, both in the US.

Selay Ghaffar, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children in Afghanistan (HAWCA)

Selay Ghaffar is the Executive Director of the Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children in Afghanistan (HAWCA). A member of the ERAW Committee Afghanistan since its foundation in 1999, her commitment to efforts to eliminate violence against women include cooperating with the Ministry of Women Affairs in drafting Afghanistan's first ERAW law, recently signed by the President. A member of the Afghan Women's Network and the Civil Society and Human Rights Network Afghanistan, she is a frequent participant at global women's rights meetings, including the South Asian Conference on CEDAW Concluding Observations in India, the conference on "Gender, Women Rights and Politics" at Viterbo University in Italy.

She has special expertise on UN SCR 1325 and women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and special training in human rights law and international standards. Ms. Ghaffar served as a member of the official delegation to Geneva for the presentation of the Universal Period Report on Human Rights (UPR) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. She holds a MBA from the Asian Management Foundation at Islamabad University.

Homa Sabri, Senior Unit Manager for UNIFEM Afghanistan

Homa Sabri is the Senior Unit Manager for UNIFEM Afghanistan. As a dedicated women's human rights activist she has worked in and around Afghanistan for 30 years, including 17 years in protection with UNICEF Afghanistan. In addition to her work with the United Nations she has currently serves as a member of the President's Special Advisory Board for appointment at the high level political posts and on the board of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

In championing women's human rights in Afghanistan, Homa participated in the Bonn conference on Afghanistan in 2001, and represented women in Afghanistan's 2002

Emergency Loya Jirga and in the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga. Wherever possible she engages with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission as an advisor and facilitator. She holds a BA in field of non-formal educations, Gender and Development from International Educations Center, the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Anne Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor for Governance Peace and Security UNIFEM

Anne Marie Goetz is Chief Advisor for Governance Peace and Security at UNIFEM. Her areas of work include preventing the use of sexual and gender based violence as a method of warfare, supporting women's engagement in peace processes, gender-sensitive security sector reform, and inclusive peace-building post-conflict. Prior to joining UNIFEM in 2005, she was a Professor of Political Science at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

She has studied pro-poor and gender-sensitive approaches to public sector reforms, anti-corruption initiatives, and decentralization, and has also studied means of supporting political liberalization and state-building in fragile states and post-conflict situations. She is the author of six books on the subjects of gender and politics in developing countries, and on accountability reforms. Her PhD in Politics is from Cambridge University, and her MSc in International Relations is from the London School of Economics.

Carla Koppell, Director of The Institute for Inclusive Security

Carla Koppell directs The Institute for Inclusive Security and the Washington, DC office of Hunt Alternatives Fund. In that role, she works extensively with women and civil society leaders from conflict areas worldwide including the Middle East, Iraq, Sudan, and Uganda. Carla speaks and writes widely on the contributions of women and civil society to peace building. Previously, Carla was senior adviser and interim director of the Conflict Prevention Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where she authored "Preventing the Next Wave of Conflict: Understanding Non-Traditional Threats to Global Stability."

She served as deputy assistant secretary for international affairs of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, was special assistant to the administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and director of the USAID climate change program. She has also worked for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and received her master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School and her bachelor's degree from Cornell University.