



PROJECT FOR AFGHAN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

AFGHAN WOMEN LEADERS SPEAK

November 17-19, 2005

*Mershon Center for International Security Studies
The Ohio State University
1501 Neil Avenue
Columbus, OH 43201*



[Registration Information](#)

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In November 2005, the Mershon Center at Ohio State University will host the first research-oriented conference in the United States on Afghan women's role in their country's social reconstruction. The conference, entitled "**Afghan Women Leaders Speak: Conflict Mitigation and Social Reconstruction,**" brings together a substantial representation of Afghan women leaders with U.S.-based scholars and students who share expertise and interests relevant to the experiences of women working for social change in Afghanistan. From November 17-19, eleven Afghan women currently performing key roles in government, education, and NGO projects will express their views and share their strategies for Afghanistan's future. See [Background information](#) for further details about the origins of this conference.



[Conference sessions](#) are free and open to the public, but advance registration is firmly requested so that all can be accommodated. Speakers include Dr. Massouda Jalal, Minister for Women's Affairs and former candidate for President of Afghanistan, and Dr. Habiba Sorabi, Afghanistan's first woman provincial governor. Other panel discussions will address such topics as: conditions for Afghan Women since the fall of the Taliban; current government and NGO projects working to benefit Afghan women; on-going needs for women of different ethnicities, economic status, and geographic locations within Afghanistan; prospects and plans for women's future empowerment; gender issues raised by the new Afghan Constitution; and women's leadership and religion. See the complete [conference agenda](#) for more information.



No prior registration is required for the opening reception, but registration for the conference itself is required by Monday November 7, 2005. There is no registration fee for any conference events, but space is limited. See [registration information](#) on this website for more information and instructions.

Acknowledgments



Funding for the conference and the larger Project for Afghan Women's Leadership has been generously provided by the following OSU units: [the Mershon Center for International Security Studies](#); [the Office of International Affairs](#); [Critical Difference for Women](#); [the Office of Research](#); [the Multicultural Center](#); [the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#); [OSU-WID](#); [CIRIT--Clusters of Interdisciplinary Research on International Themes](#); [the Middle East Studies Center](#); [the Department of Women's Studies](#); [the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures](#); [The Asia Foundation](#); [the American Institute for Afghan Studies](#), and the [National League of Women Voters](#). The [Ohio](#) and [Columbus](#) chapters of the League of Women Voters have also provided funding and in-kind support. We also thank the following private donors for their financial support: Marie Sinsabaugh, Joan Harris, Addie Leibin, and Judith Wright.



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Registration Information

The conference will be held at the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University, located at 1501 Neil Ave. Conference attendance is free, and sessions are open to university faculty and students and to community members. Only the Saturday afternoon session is restricted to registered OSU students. A detailed schedule of events can be viewed on this website through the "conference agenda" link.



While there is no charge for attendance, we do ask that you submit a registration form which can be downloaded [here](#). Download, complete, and mail this form to

Sally Kitch c/o Melanie Maltry
Mershon Center for International Security Studies
1501 Neil Ave.
Columbus, OH 43210



All attendees must register by November 7, 2005

Meals:



Complimentary refreshments will be available at the conference reception, on Wednesday, November 16. OSU students registered for the conference will be offered lunch at no cost on Saturday, November 19.

All other meals must be requested and purchased prior to the conference. The cost of lunch, which will be held at the Faculty Club, is \$14.00; lunch on Friday, held at Mershon, is \$12.00. Dinner on Friday is \$24.00 each. All arrangements for these meals must be made at least one week prior to the conference through Melanie Maltry. Please contact her at maltry.3@osu.edu or submit a registration form via mail.



Distance Visitors:

If you plan to travel to attend the conference, a block of rooms has been reserved at The Hampton Inn in the Short North, 501 N High St Columbus, OH 43215. The cost per single or double room is \$95.00 per night. Reservations should be made through the hotel (614) 559-2000.



Hourly visitor parking is available at four university parking facilities: Tuttle, Ohio Union, 12th Ave., and Hospitals garages. In addition, prepaid visitor passes can be purchased through the university. See

<http://tp.osu.edu/visitorsmain/parking/parkingpermits.shtml>



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About the Conference



"Afghan Women Leaders Speak" is the latest project of OSU's Project for Afghan Women's Leadership (PAWL). That project, which combines scholarship and social action, began in 2001 as a response to international politics that made gender issues prominent in the pursuit of human rights, democratization, social and economic development, and global peace and security. Governments worldwide, including the U.S. government, began to recognize that highly stratified gender relations and the disempowerment and selective victimization of women contribute to political instability and cycles of violence and terrorism. UN Resolution 1325, passed in October 2000, also identified women as both highly vulnerable targets of conflict and vital participants in conflict mitigation. Project organizers, Professors Sally Kitch and Margaret Mills, seek to develop and analyze new data to support such global gender awareness by focusing on Afghanistan as a key case with global significance.



In addition to the "Afghan Women Leaders Speak" conference, other project activities have included:



- A lecture series in 2003 to educate the university community. Speakers included Maliha Zulficar, former Deputy Minister of Higher Education in Afghanistan; RAWA spokesperson Tahmina Feryal and Professor Anne Brodsky, author of *With All Our Strength, A History Of The Revolutionary Association Of Afghan Women (RAWA)*.
- Sponsorship of a President's and Provost's Diversity Series distinguished lecturer, Mahnaz Afkhami, former Minister of Women's Affairs in Iran and current Director of Women's Learning Partnerships in Washington, D.C.
- Recruitment of a working interest group of more than thirty faculty from from sixteen departments and academic units in six colleges.
- Paper, panel, and community presentations, including:
 - "Appropriating Women's Issues: States' Uses of Feminism to Achieve Political Legitimacy," panel and individual papers at the annual meeting of the National Council for Research on Women, Mills College, Oakland, CA. [Kitch and Mills]
 - "Leadership, Gender and Islam: Developments in Afghanistan" at Denison College (Goodspeed Lecture) [Mills]
 - "Gender and Ethnicity across Divides: Appropriating Women's Issues: States, Ethnicity and Gender Politics in South and Central Asia," CIRIT 2nd Annual Symposium, OSU [Mills and Kitch];



• "Afghan Women: A Political Update," League of Women Voters, Columbus [Kitch];

• "Feminist Theory and Issues of Global Peace and Security," Universalist Unitarian Church, Columbus [Kitch];

- "Folklore, Politics, Civil Society and Social Change in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Kabul, Afghanistan [Mills];
- "Afghanistan and Iraq in the Post-9/11 Era," Middle East Center Forum, OSU [Mills];
- "Afghanistan in August," Mershon Center research brownbag talk [Mills].

A graduate readings course and a new undergraduate course, to be offered in Autumn 2005 under HUM 489,

entitled "Afghan Women in Social Reconstruction."

- Electronic resource collection on reserve at Main Library.



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Wednesday November 15

4:30-6:00pm

Opening Reception

Remarks from OSU President Karen Holbrook and Representative Deborah Pryce



Thursday November 16

9:00am

Conference Opening

Conference Coordinators Dr. Sally Kitch and Dr. Margaret Mills



9:15-10:30am

Panel One: Current State of Affairs for Afghan Women

Panelists discuss current categories of need for Afghan women and speak to the ways in which international efforts have responded fruitfully or failed to respond.



12:30-2:00pm

Keynote Luncheon: Dr. Masuda Jalal, Minister of Women's Affairs, Afghanistan

Presented in Conjunction with The Columbus Council on World Affairs

Introduced by Kay Maxwell, President of the National League of Women Voters



2:30-5:00pm

Panel Two: Current Projects

Panelists discuss the specifics of their development work for women



5:00-5:30pm

Rapporteur responds to day's events

Friday November 17

9:00-9:30am

Keynote: Habiba Sarabi, Governor of Bamiyan Province, former Minister of Women's Affairs

10:00-11:15am

Panel Three: Urban and Rural Women: Their Lives and Options

Panelists discuss the broad range of differences among Afghan women and strategize for working across difference.

12:00-1:00pm

Panel Four: Women's Empowerment

Panelists discuss the best modes of mobilization to women's empowerment (state, social, economic).

1:00-2:30

Lunch

2:45-5:00pm

Break-Out Strategizing Sessions and Public Discussion

5:00-5:30

Rapporteur responds to day's events

Saturday November 18

9:00-11:30am

Panel Five: Women's Leadership and Religion

Panelists consider the use of religious and customary strategies to promote women's empowerment and political mobilization.

11:30-12:30 pm

Morning respondents

Conference Wrap-up

12:30-2:00pm

Lunch with Ohio State University Students

2:30-3:30

Small group meetings of conference presenters and OSU students

3:30-5:00

Student reports and open discussion

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[**Massouda Jalal**](#)



[**Habiba Sorabi**](#)

[**Marzia Meena**](#)

[**Lisa Soroush**](#)



[**Farida Azizi**](#)

[**Sajia Behgam**](#)

[**Masuda Sultan**](#)

[**Marzia Basel**](#)



[**Aziza Ahmadyar**](#)

[**Jamila Afghani**](#)

[**Sweeta Noori**](#)



Jamila Afghani

Jamila Afghani, 30 years old, currently runs Noor Educational Center (NEC), operating on a volunteer basis since 2001 to provide education for women and children. She is an executive member of the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), an umbrella organization for more than forty Afghan women-run NGO's (non-governmental organizations) and of the Kabul Orthopedic Organization (KOO), and Omid Learning Center (OLC). She earned a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Peshawar, Pakistan, after completing her BA in law and civics education. She is fluent in Persian, Pashto, Urdu, and Arabic, and has done private MA studies in Islamic education (Qur'an, Hadith and Fiqh). She is a columnist for various newspapers, writing on politics, Islam and related women's issues.

Aziza Ahmadyar

Aziza Ahmadyar grew up in Kunduz in northern Afghanistan, during the reign of King Zahir and that of Prime Minister Daud Khan. She graduated from local schools and went on to study literature at Kabul University, then returned to Kunduz as a Dari language teacher and later Director of the high school from which she had graduated. Kunduz was a very progressive city at that time and she could take students from her girls' high

school to sports contests with other girls' schools and on cultural field trips, now impossible. In 1975, during Daud's leadership, she ran for the Constitutional Loya Jirga, to draw up a new national constitution, and was elected as a representative from Kunduz, one of six women representatives in the whole country, the first women to occupy such positions. Her father was a very progressive man whom she credits for actively supporting her education and professional development. He was the chief administrator of the municipality of Kunduz under Prime Minister Daud, and centrally involved in the organization of the government's cotton industry there. He was under severe pressure from the Communists to join the Party after the coup of 1978, but refused. He was subsequently assassinated in his home, probably by the Communists. Ms. Ahmadyar remains skeptical of all party politics.

Ms. Ahmadyar spent the years of the Communist regime in Kabul , where it was possible to work as a teacher without joining the Party. She left there with other family members under conditions of deteriorating security in 1989, and spent fifteen years as a refugee in Peshawar , Pakistan . She has worked for fourteen years on education projects with various NGO's, including the International Rescue Committee (1991 to 1998) and the Afghan Women's Resource Group (AWRC), 1998 to 2004. In 2002 AWRC counted 11,000 women students in its programs. The AWRC now works in Afghanistan on women's literacy, related education projects, income generation and microcredit, and voter registration. In 2005, Ms. Ahmadyar was recruited to occupy the newly created position of Foreign Liaison Officer in the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism.

Farida Azizi

Ms. Azizi is a Program Manager for Afghanistan Program at Vital Voices Global Partnership. She is a leading advocate for peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan . Ms. Azizi served as a Project Manager for the Back to Work/Back to School project which served to provide income-generating employment for Afghan widows while providing school uniforms to young girls returning to school for the first time in years. She is also serving at the board of Tahirih Justice Center based in US. As a peace activist, she has worked to promote the human rights of women through her work within the aid community and her advocacy at the international level. Ms. Azizi represented Afghan women at the Hill to support CEDAW (The Convention of Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) a treaty for the rights of women, along with other organizations and US senator and congressmen and congresswomen. While a Program Officer for the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) Afghanistan Program from 1996-2000, Farida supervised the women's program, carried out by NCA's twenty partner organizations. Her responsibilities included capacity-building programs for Afghan women in the peace-building and rehabilitation of Afghanistan . Farida was one of the founding members of the Cooperation for Peace and Unity, a network committed to developing peace capacities at the grassroots level. She is a founding and steering committee member of the Policy Council on Afghan Women, a coalition of organizations collaborating to address issues that impact the people of Afghanistan in general, and Afghan women in particular, in their struggle to effect peace, democracy, women's rights, human rights, and reconstruction in their homeland. She is also a member of the Afghan Women's Network, based in Kabul, and is a fluent Farsi (Dari), Pashto, and English speaker.

Marzia Basel

Marzia Basel has both extensive training and experience in international relations, women in development, and law. After receiving her Bachelor's in Law and Political Science from Kabul University in 1985, she was employed as a judge in both civil and criminal courts in Kabul and later served in The Supreme Court Legal Aid Department and the Kabul Public Security Court. During the years of 1996-2001 in which the Taliban ruled Afghanistan , Basel ran a private, home-based school for women where she designed programming and taught English. Since the fall of the Taliban, she has been very active in state reconstruction serving on the Kabul Public Security Court , acting as a representative for the establishment of the Independent Afghan Judicial Commission, and acting as an officer for the Emergency Loya Jirga Commission. She has also been integral to women's mobilization in reconstruction working for the Afghan Women Development Association as Director, the Afghan Women Judges Association as Director, UNIFEM Afghanistan as a Gender Justice Officer, and acting on the Afghan Constitution Commission in a unit for women in the election process. An accomplished and knowledgeable woman, she has attended and spoken at various international conferences including the "Women in Post-Conflict Situations" in Tokyo Japan, "Women and Gender Equality" in Paris, France, and "The Muslim Women in the World Conference," Berlin, Germany. Most recently, Basel has received her Master's in International Law from George Washington University .

Sajia Behgam

Sajia Behgam is completing her undergraduate studies at Kabul University while working for Medica

Mondiale, where she has conducted research and created publications on the topics of trafficked women and child marriage, among other issues which are the object of Medica Mondiale's intervention programs. Medica Mondiale has established and runs safe houses for women transiting from incarceration or escaped from trafficking situations, and has conducted very popular driver education classes for women, among their other projects. At Kabul University, Sajia Behgam is a founding organizer of the Women's Internet Café, a World-Bank-initiated, self-sustaining project that serves all students and faculty, providing for-pay internet access and duplication services for classroom and research use, and is run entirely by women students.

Dr. Massouda Jalal

Emerging vibrantly into the political arena immediately subsequent to the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Dr. Jalal was nominated the regional delegate to the Emergency Loya Jirga. Campaigning for the position of President in the interim government, she placed second to Hamid Karzai in the race. Though chosen by Karzai as Vice President, she declined the position vocally decrying his government for not advancing the social position of women. Instead, Jalal began a political campaign for the Presidency in the elections of 2004 in order to achieve her own agenda, becoming the first and only female candidate for the presidency. Critiquing male leaders' affiliation with warlords and promotion of ethnic violence, Jalal campaigned as the only candidate who did not have "blood on her hands." Her platform promoted basic sustenance, jobs for demobilized soldiers, improved healthcare, and gender equality. Indeed, she is noted for saying "there will be justice and equal rights for all, man and woman alike, an end to discrimination and respect for every individual." Finishing sixth out of eighteen candidates, she was subsequently nominated as Minister to the newly created Ministry of Women's Affairs, a position she currently holds.

Prior to her activity in the Afghan government, Dr. Jalal was employed as a pediatrician, taught at Kabul University, and worked for the UN's World Food Program.

Marzia Meena

Marzia Meena was born in Kabul in 1975. After graduating from local public schools, she studied for a BA at Kabul University, and focused on law and peace studies. During the Islamic revolution in Afghanistan, Marzia Meena and her family were forced to flee to Pakistan. Sometimes dressed as an extremist Islamist partisan and sometimes as young Pakistani woman, she worked with other peace activist on human rights and democracy issues while in exile, but by 1998 pacifist strategies seemed untenable vis a vis the Taliban government. Yet she continued the work as a member of Peace Action and other human rights and peace activist groups, which included nomination for the project entitled 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005. Her grassroots work has continued, on peace and democratization, particularly on civic education for the presidential and parliamentary elections, and nonviolence initiatives for civil society development. Currently she works on gender initiatives for the Asian Development Bank.

Sweeta Noori

Sweeta Noori currently serves as the Afghanistan Country Director for Women for Women International, which is a non-profit organization that helps women in survivors of war rebuild their lives in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo, Nigeria, and Rwanda.

In October, 2005, Ms. Noori addressed the United Nations Security Council about the status of women in Afghanistan for the fifth anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. In her speech, Ms. Noori described two Afghanistans. "The United Nations sees one Afghanistan that is progressing and developing. Yet there is another Afghanistan ... It is violent, unstable and in many ways very scary for women," she said. "We do not want the international community to abandon Afghanistan before we have secured a stable future for all women, men and children," she added.

Ms. Noori joined Women for Women International in 2002 and became the Country Director in 2003. She directs a \$1.01 million budget in programs that help more than 4,500 women by providing direct financial assistance, rights education, and vocational skills training. Ms. Noori launched one of Afghanistan's only microcredit lending programs targeted specifically at women. She manages a \$160,000 portfolio in microcredit loans to 2,600 women and ensures a 99% repayment rate.

Under Ms. Noori's leadership, Women for Women International teamed up with Afghanistan Ministry of Women's Affairs to register 2,000 women to vote in the historic October 2004 elections. Since then, over 3,500 women participants have registered to vote, despite facing security risks.

Before joining Women for Women International, Ms. Noori served as an assistant for the Chair of the Loya Jerga Commission in forming the interim administration of Afghanistan . Prior to her work with the Loya Jerga, she traveled with an official Afghan delegation to Belgium to raise funds for peace building and post-war reconstruction from donors and representatives of the international community. Ms. Noori has also worked for International Human Rights Law Group.

During the mid-1990's, Ms. Noori was forced to move from Kabul to Pakistan and did not return until 1996. In Pakistan , Ms. Noori established a primary school to address the needs of Afghan boys and girl refugees. She also worked with the International Rescue Committee on health, agriculture, small business and education projects. In 1996, Ms. Noori returned to Kabul and continued her work with IRC as a team leader for implementing health and education initiatives in various parts of Afghanistan .

Ms. Noori currently serves on the board of Afghan Civil Society Forum and she is an active member of the Women and Politics Forum in Kabul .

Ms. Noori studied to become a doctor at the Medical University of Afghanistan.

Habiba Sorabi

Trained as a pharmacist, Habiba Sorabi has been very active in Afghanistan 's reconstruction. Working both in Afghanistan and in refugee camps in Pakistan , she has developed health clinics to serve remote populations. She has also worked as a professor and manager of the Afghan Institute of Learning. In 2001, she was nominated for the position of Women's Affairs Minister in the Emergency Loya Jirga Session. In this position, she helped to establish women's employment centers in fourteen provinces. Recently, Karzai appointed Sorabi the Governor of the Bamiyan province, making her the first female governor.

Lisa Soroush

Lisa Soroush is in the process of completing a medical degree from Kabul University that was interrupted not only by the Taliban's arrival in Kabul but also by the civil war among "jihadi" factions that preceded the Taliban in the early 1990's. During this chaotic decade, particularly during the Taliban period, she worked to organize informal and clandestine girls' schools in the Kabul area that ultimately enrolled approximately 1600 girls.

Masuda Sultan

Masuda Sultan has been working on the economic and political empowerment of Afghan women through a variety of roles over the last four years. She serves as Program Director of Women for Afghan Women, an organization that advocates for and provides support to Afghan women, and is on the advisory board of the Business Council for Peace, an organization that helps women build sustainable businesses in post-conflict countries. She is a member of the Women Waging Peace network and recently co-authored the report on Afghanistan entitled, "From Rhetoric to Reality: Afghan Women on the Agenda for Peace" . Ms. Sultan produced and narrated "From Ground Zero to Ground Zero", the first documentary on Afghan civilian casualties to air on US television, later shown in Europe and Japan. She is a contributing author to Women for Afghan Women: Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future. She recently completed her Master's in Public Administration at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and currently a consultant on Afghan women's issues. Ms. Sultan left Afghanistan at the age of five and resides in the United States.