

**For Immediate Release:
Thursday, March 31, 2022**

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**American Women's Peace and Education Delegation to Kabul,
Afghanistan Report on Their Findings
Group calls for Schools to Open to Girls and for Afghan Central Bank Funds to be
Released to Afghans**



[Kabul, Afghanistan]--On Thursday, March 31, 2022 an **American Women's Peace and Education Delegation** visiting Kabul for the past week held a press conference at the Intercontinental Hotel to report on their findings. Delegation members spoke of their efforts to unfreeze Afghan Central Bank funds and of the overwhelming support they heard for all Afghan girls to have access to education.

“While the world's attention has turned to the crisis in Ukraine, we felt it was critical to bring attention to the continued plight of the Afghan people,” explained **Masuda Sultan**, an Afghan-American who organized the delegation of prominent women, and is a cofounder of the U.S. group Unfreeze Afghanistan.

The group planned their travel to coincide with the week the government had announced they would be opening all schools to girls, and were disappointed when the government did

not allow girls from 7th-10th grade to return to school. They met with affected girls, parents, and teachers who shared their thoughts.

“We met with girls this week whose schooling was cut off in the middle of exams, girls who reported being depressed at the loss of their education,” explained **Ruth Messinger**, a Jewish American human rights advocate. “One young woman said her goal was to help build a strong country at peace where everyone could learn. What a simple and powerful vision.”

Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of NY, speaking of the girls, said: “Whether they were bringing books to their neighbors or staying up late to study at home, their thirst for knowledge is Afghanistan’s great gift. These students will be the country’s next generation of doctors, midwives and professors, but only if they get access to ALL levels of schooling.”

When the delegation met with the Ministry of Education they were told “Girls until sixth class can attend classes and schools, and for the rest, we are working on a plan. After permission of the Amir (the leader), we will allow them to come back to schools.”

According to the Ministry of Education, 10,000,000 students are now in schools with 242,000 teachers. The ministry said that some girls’ high schools are operating in Mazar, Herat and Badakshan. The delegation urged more specificity and more rapid action.

Daisy Khan, founder Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality and an Islamic scholar, approached the issue of girls’ education from an Islamic viewpoint. “Today in Afghanistan, many policy discussions are being articulated in the framework of Islam. Throughout our visit, I talked to government officials and NGOs about the great emphasis Islam places on the the pursuit of knowledge and how the rights of women and girls are protected by the Quran and the Prophet’s teachings.”

“All week we have been listening to disheartened Afghan girls whose dreams have been put on hold,” said **Medea Benjamin**, co-founder of the women’s peace organization CODEPINK. “As women, we cannot stand by quietly while Afghan girls are barred from schools, or while our government freezes billions of dollars that could—and should—be used to feed and care for hungry Afghan children.”

The delegation met with officials of the Central Bank to learn more about the effects of the frozen Afghan Central Bank (DAB) funds on the country’s economy. More than \$7 billion dollars of DAB funds are held by the U.S. and more than \$2.5 billion are in European banks.

“It is clear from what we saw and heard this week that Afghanistan needs its central bank funds returned as soon as possible to shore up the banking system and help fuel the economy,” explained **Kelly Campbell**, co-founder of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. “The Afghan Central Bank money does not belong to 9/11 families or to the Taliban. The money belongs to the people of Afghanistan. I am here to say to Afghans that you are not alone, there are many in the US who want you to have your funds back, and we will keep struggling alongside you to achieve this goal.”

The nation’s central bank reserves are being withheld at a devastating time when Afghanistan has experienced a 40% drop in GDP, worse and faster than the Great Depression in the US.

“We must remember that this money belongs to no one but the Afghan people, and even the Taliban have said this,” asserted **Masuda Sultan**. “They must get their money back for currency reserves and liquidity for the banking system, something the US helped build here.”

“The Afghan people did nothing to deserve the devastating hunger, joblessness and poverty that is resulting from the sanctions on their country,” said **Sunita Viswanath**, co-founder of Women for Afghan Women and Hindus for Human Rights. “The only moral and ethical thing for the American government to do is to unfreeze the assets of the Afghan people.”

The delegates have deep ties to Afghanistan, and several of them are faith leaders. Many members of the group are involved with Unfreeze Afghanistan, an organization committed to releasing aid to the country and central reserves back to the Afghan Central Bank (DAB).

The delegates have visited local NGOs, a clinic, an orphanage, a shelter and schools; met with various local leaders and advocated for expanding education for all girls and for additional humanitarian aid dollars to be made available in a country with severe unmet needs. They have met with government officials and Central Bank representatives to advance their causes.

Interviews with the delegates are available upon request.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Masuda Sultan is a co-founder of Unfreeze Afghanistan. She is an Afghan-American women's rights activist and entrepreneur who has been working for over 20 years in support of women and girls in education, vocational training and protection from violence. In 2008, Ms. Sultan was appointed as an advisor to the Ministry of Finance in Afghanistan. She is a co-founder of All in Peace, a coalition of organizations dedicated to bringing the longest war in American history to a peaceful end. Ms. Sultan currently serves on the Council on Foreign Relations Women and Foreign Policy Advisory Committee and is a member of the US-Afghan Women's Council. Her memoir, *My War at Home*, was published in early 2006 by Simon & Schuster. She has an MPA from Harvard University.

Medea Benjamin is the cofounder of the foreign policy advocacy group Global Exchange, the women-led peace group CODEPINK and the advocacy organization Unfreeze Afghanistan. She has been active around Afghanistan for 20 years, including seeking compensation for Afghan war victims, raising funds for girls' schools and advocating for an end to the U.S. military intervention.

"I learned so much on the delegation about the deep desire of Afghan girls to go to school and take their rightful place in society. We call on the Taliban to open all schools to girls. We also witnessed the devastating state of the Afghan economy and call on President Biden to unfreeze the Central Bank funds being held in U.S. banks."

Kelly Campbell is a co-founder of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows and traveled to Afghanistan in January, 2002 with other 9/11 family members to call attention to Afghan civilian casualties. She is co-chair of the group's Afghanistan committee which is currently focused on ensuring that all the Afghan Central Bank funds are returned to the Afghan people where they belong and not held for the purpose of settling lawsuits by 9/11 family members.

"Twenty years ago, when I traveled to Afghanistan, I met girls who were so excited to be in school for the first time. I have returned to witness the situation for Afghan women and girls today and see how we in the international community can best support them."

Sunita Viswanath is a cofounder and former board member of the 21 year old women's organization Women for Afghan Women. She is a progressive Hindu faith leader and cofounder of Hindus for Human Rights. She is an advisory member of the advocacy organization Unfreeze Afghanistan.

“I am part of this women’s peace and education delegation in order to stand witness to the brave grassroots efforts in present day Afghanistan for women and girls’ rights and wellbeing and their access to education, and to participate in humanitarian aid at this time of economic crisis and near famine.”

Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer is Executive Director of The Interfaith Center of New York, an organization that works to overcome prejudice and violence by activating the power of the city’s grassroots religious leaders. Breyer first went to Afghanistan in 2003 for an interfaith effort to rebuild a bombed mosque. She returned multiple times as a board member of Afghans4 Tomorrow to support schools and a health clinic in Wardak Province. An Episcopal priest in the Diocese of New York, Breyer assists at St. Philip’s Church in Harlem. Her doctoral work was in Islamophobia and Christian Peacemaking, and she received her Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from Union Theological Seminary in 2017.

“After first going to Afghanistan in 2003 as part of an interfaith effort to rebuild a bombed mosque north of Kabul and then returning to provide ongoing support for a girls and boys school and a health clinic, I am glad to return once again. I share the conviction with other members of this delegation that one measure of peace in Afghanistan and around the world is how many girls are able to attend school.”

Ruth Messinger is the former President and inaugural Global Ambassador of American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and was formerly part of the State Department’s Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. Ruth is also currently doing domestic social justice work at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and at the Marlene Meyerson JCC of Manhattan. Ruth is also an icon in New York politics: she served as a NY City Council member and then as Manhattan Borough President.

“My connection to Afghanistan goes back to 1998 and my early days at American Jewish World Service when we worked with Dr. Sakena Yacoobi and the Afghan Institute of Learning to provide support for schools that continued to provide girls’ education despite the ban. I have continued to have an active interest in the issues for women and girls, worked with several in this delegation on the serious problem of getting teachers and health care workers paid and on the challenge of helping Afghans who are seeking to leave the country. I am tremendously concerned now with the threats of famine and deteriorating health care and think it is critical to visit, help on the ground and bring information back to the US to do informed advocacy.”

Daisy Khan is a Muslim campaigner, reformer, and executive director of the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality, a women-led organization committed to peacebuilding, equality, and justice for Muslims around the world.