



Opening Remarks for Rebuilding Afghanistan Foundation Reception
Ambassador Said T. Jawad
Embassy of Afghanistan
04/04/2006

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our home. We are honored by your presence.

Allow me to acknowledge the presence of some of our distinguished guests, tonight:

Ambassador and Mrs. Aboud of Lebanon,
Ambassador Al-Hajiri of Yemen,
Ambassador Al Mughairy of the Sultanate of Oman,
Ambassador Kolar of the Czech Republic,
Ambassador and Mrs. Lowell of Malta,
Ambassador Sen of India,
Senator and Mrs. Stevens,
Senator Reed,
Congresswoman Harman,
Congressman Boozman,
Secretary Jackson,
Ambassador Crumpton,
Princess Yasmine Pahlavi, and
Ms. Mary Cheney,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by asking a simple question: Can you write the history of the future? To answer this, I would like to share a history that I have told to some of you. Two years ago, a school in Logar, a province south of Kabul, was set on fire by terrorists. The Moghul Khail School, consisting of two large tents, was set ablaze at midnight. The next day, every little girl, every student of Mughul Khail showed up at the school. They sat next to the ashes of their burned out class rooms, under the blazing sun, and insisted on continuing with their lessons. This is the spirit of the Afghan people, when it comes to education, ladies and gentlemen.

Afghans are determined to rebuild their country and President Karzai is committed to work with the United States of America and the international community, as well as the Afghan and International NGO'S to further reinforce reconstruction, peace and stability in Afghanistan. Those of you who have visited Afghanistan know how rapidly the country is changing, due to our partnership with the U.S. and your support.

In Afghanistan, the first day of spring is also the first day of school. Two weeks ago, over six million children returned to schools all over the country. 34% of those children were girls. As dark winter yields to the fifth bright spring since the fall of the Taliban,

we are witnessing dramatic changes in Afghanistan. I think nothing is more beautiful than a group of Afghan girls in their black and white uniforms walking to their first day of school in a remote village of Afghanistan.

Today, Kabul's net student enrollment is 87%. This is the model that we hope to replicate in the more remote areas of Afghanistan, where student enrollment is still not as high as we want it to be. Thanks to organizations like the Rebuilding Afghanistan Foundation, we are closer to achieving our goal.

However, a hard question still remains: what kind of school building are they walking toward? After nearly three decades of war, 80% of Afghanistan's schools are in ruins. Eighty percent. This is a devastating loss. It took us a half of century to build them. Even today, only 29% of the schools are under a roof. Most children sit under the shade of trees or tents to study.

This is why organizations like the Rebuilding Afghanistan Foundation are so essential, and why the accomplishments of Elizabeth, Alexandra and my friend Malalai are so remarkable.

For example, the Mayar School built by the RAF in the village of Sheik Yassin is changing the lives of 250 Afghan girls for ever by giving them a opportunity to go to a descent school with well paid and qualified teachers.

Elizabeth and Alexandra, thank you for giving your students in Afghanistan a new school, a new life, as well as new friends here in America through your pen pal program.

I know that Rebuilding Afghanistan Foundation is trying to replicate this thriving model in Kapisa Province. Please support them in bringing the precious gift of education to a whole new group of children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These young women have their own jobs. They are all very busy and quite successful. But they are taking the time to care for education and children. We are grateful to every one of them. We are also grateful for the support of the U.S. Government and Congress and value the sacrifice of the U.S. soldiers, who are fighting to make Afghanistan and the world a safer place.

With more schools, better textbooks, and trained teachers, we are writing the history of our future. A beautiful future, where the inspiring image of uniformed Afghan girls attending classes in the small villages of Afghanistan will become a commonplace reality. Investing in education is investing in the future of peace and security.

And to answer my opening question, yes, you can write the history of the future, if you invest in education.

Thank you.