

# Afghanistan Relief Organization

A non-profit 501c3 humanitarian non-governmental organization

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*THE ARO E-NEWSLETTER UPDATE*

*NOVEMBER 2005*

## British Embassy - Kabul awards Grant to ARO Education Center

(Oct. 6, 2005) The **British Embassy** in Kabul presented an operational grant to the Afghanistan Relief Organization (ARO), funding ARO's **Technical Education Center (TEC)** teacher salaries and school expenses for a projected one-year period. The \$33,000 grant will be awarded in two phases, allowing for a follow up review by the Embassy and activity/expense reporting by ARO.

The volunteers and staff of ARO express their deep appreciation to **HM Ambassador Dr Rosalind Marsden CMG** and the staff of the British Embassy.

The grant will fund specific fixed expenses at the TEC, while allowing current fundraising efforts to be devoted to other critical needs. ARO will continue to fundraise for water and sanitation system improvements, replacement of an outdated electrical system, a heating system for winter classes, school equipment, satellite internet connection, relief vehicle replacement, and other ongoing, critical operations and maintenance costs. The three-year old education center now provides classes for over 800 girls and boys, with additional programs providing educational and vocational programs to adults.

Staff at the British Embassy conducted a month-long review and inspection of ARO's education center. In early October, ARO **Chairman Abul Fazel Khalili** was asked to visit the British Embassy and awarded the one-year grant contract.

The Embassy provides Afghan and international NGOs with small grants (of up to £30k), for projects supporting the development of Afghan education, health, media, women's economic participation, and culture-related activities.

ARO volunteers travel at their own expense and on their personal vacation time, in order to minimize our expenses and maximize our investment in the reconstruction and education of Afghanistan. Our volunteers—from Afghanistan, the United States, Europe and Asia—are of many backgrounds and faiths, and our focus is humanitarian. ARO volunteers have provided educational programs, and distributed relief aid and school supplies to Kabul area and outlying communities, including Bamiyan, Mazar I-Sharif, Tora Bora, Jalalabad, Paghman, and Parwan.

## European Union Observation Mission (EU EOM) Donates Equipment and Furniture to ARO's Technical Education Center

(November 2005) Representatives of the **European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM)** donated surplus equipment and furniture to ARO's **Technology Education Center (TEC)**. The furniture and equipment—estimated at approximately a \$10,000.00 value—included office desks, tables, chairs, a large generator, fans, air conditioners, and computer equipment (see *photo of the donation upon its arrival at the TEC*).

The EOM was deployed to Afghanistan for the 18 September parliamentary elections. Working under the leadership of Ms. Emma Bonino, a Member of the European Parliament and its Committee on Foreign Affairs, the EOM was a contribution to the reconstruction and restoration of Afghanistan by the European Commission. The Union's activities are also based on the main

international and regional instruments for the protection of human rights, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/human\\_rights/intro/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/intro/index.htm).

The EU EOM has concluded its pre and post election observations, and the donation was prompted by their need to close out their offices in Afghanistan. Representatives of the EU EOM visited ARO's Technology Education Center to assess the operations and needs, prior to the donation.

The students served at the TEC will benefit greatly from this enhancement to their learning environment. ARO expresses its deep appreciation to the EU EOM for their interest and involvement in Afghanistan, and for their generous donation to the TEC.



**The European Union Election Observation Mission donation arrives in the TEC courtyard!**

## **Ayres Hotels Donates Bedding and Linens for Basic Relief**

The **Ayres Hotels** chain states its core values as: "*We care about people. We value teamwork. We deliver results.*" They indeed live up to this! Ayres Hotels, [www.ayreshotels.com](http://www.ayreshotels.com), donated a significant amount of bedding and bathroom linens to ARO for distribution in Afghanistan. The chain delivered these supplies to their hotel in Yorba Linda, CA, and ARO volunteers transported them to our Anaheim, CA, warehouse for packing.

ARO acknowledges the consistent generosity of the Ayres Hotels, which contacted ARO again this month about another significant donation of linens!

## ARO PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

### The Sewing Initiative – How One Person Makes a Difference!

*Colorado volunteer, Margaret Stockover, provides a personal update in this newsletter on her women's self sufficiency project initiated in 2004, the Sewing Initiative. Since 2004, Margaret has traveled to Afghanistan twice to work at the education center and provide training for women in the program. Retired from a career in accounting, Margaret also donates significant time managing the ongoing accounting and reporting for ARO.*

**Background:** I joined forces with ARO in March, 2004. On a trip to Afghanistan in April, 2004, I learned that Afghan women have exquisite embroidery skills. Using the existing sewing room at the TEC and seed money raised in Colorado, I started the sewing micro-business project. A tailor was hired to teach a class, which graduated nine women who were presented with a sewing machine and supplies, and they began making shawls, shirts and dresses.

ARO volunteer, **Parween Omid**, and I traveled to Kabul again in March 2005. The program manager, **Jamilla**, was provided training to run the project in Kabul. We evaluated the skills of women who had been working or wanted to work. Sixteen women were hired! The women signed contracts and given sewing supplies, at a formal ceremony attended by a representative of the Afghan government's **Ministry of Economy**.

The purpose of this project in Afghanistan is two-fold. First and foremost, to begin to help needy women in Afghanistan make enough money to care for their families. Second, it is intended to teach responsibility, business practices, and accountability. The items that are produced for sale are inspected to ensure they are clean and well made.

**The Challenges:** The Sewing Initiative must sell at least \$600.00US each month to pay the women and purchase additional supplies. In addition, shipping costs about \$100.00US per month. The biggest difficulty has been shipping. It is very expensive to get things to and from Kabul using commercial carriers. Second is communication. Getting information to and from Kabul is also a challenge!

**The Future:** In 2006, I want to travel again to Kabul! I would like to explore the possibility of opening an outlet at locations where foreign workers in Afghanistan can see and purchase the products made by these wonderful women. As the project stabilizes, classes in both tailoring and traditional embroidery may be opened for Afghan women and girls. The product line needs to be strengthened, more women interviewed and hired, and I would like to broaden the volunteer support and marketing systems for the long term.

I am most grateful to Afghanistan Relief Organization for opening its doors to me and making this project possible. I also thank the beautiful women of Afghanistan! Their ability to persevere against all odds, their smiles, their hope and their beautiful workmanship, are more than adequate compensation, as we continue to help them become truly self sufficient.

*If you would like to help support the Sewing Initiative, please contact Margaret Stockover at [mjrsfc@comcast.net](mailto:mjrsfc@comcast.net), or contact [info@afghanrelief.com](mailto:info@afghanrelief.com).*

## Random Acts of Kindness:

### Norco Water Polo Team Lends a Helping Hand to ARO Volunteer

In September, ARO vice chairman **Abdul Satar** and fellow ARO volunteer, **Ehsan Khwajazada**, drove to Riverside County, CA, to pick up donated ring-binders—a referral from the non profit humanitarian organization, **Be The Cause**, [www.bethecause.org](http://www.bethecause.org)—to be used for school supply

distributions in Afghanistan. The binders were on large shipping pallets, and there were over 500 boxes that had to be removed from the pallets and loaded into the ARO truck. It was 6:30 p.m., getting dark, and just the two of them!

As related by Abdul Satar, “suddenly, a miracle happened!” The **Norco High School** water polo team walked out toward the parking lot with their coach, everyone still wet from swimming practice. The ARO team decided to ask them for help, offering to pay the young students for their time. The water polo coach, **Cindy Robinson**, asked for more information, and Abdul and Ehsan told her about ARO and how the school supply donation would be used. Coach Robinson said, “No problem!” and offered their help, refusing any offers of payment.

Seven students from the water polo team helped load all the boxes into the truck, and what might have taken a couple of hours took only minutes! ARO wishes to acknowledge this act of kindness and the generous spirit shown by the **Norco High School Water Polo Team**: Nicholas Bertagnoli, Daniel Guerrero, Chris Pinkernell, Adrian Garcia, Gilbert Sotelo, Kiffer Ipsen, and Jordan Nelson.

## **Meet ARO Volunteers at San Diego Afghan Basketball Tourney**

The **Afghan Basketball Tournament** will be held at **University of California San Diego (UCSD)**, Rimal center, **Dec. 17 – 18**. Meet ARO volunteers at an informational booth at the tournament and learn more about ARO’s projects in Afghanistan. The Afghan Basketball tournaments are a great opportunity to watch athletes from the Afghan community, join the families that come to cheer them on, and meet some great volunteers. Get more information about the Afghan Basketball Tournament at [www.afgbasketball.com](http://www.afgbasketball.com), click on "Tournaments" then "Solid River, San Diego Basketball Tournament".

**ABOUT ARO:** Afghanistan Relief Organization (ARO) is a non-political, secular (non-religious), 501c3 nonprofit, humanitarian organization. Our mission is to provide education and deliver relief aid, guaranteeing the distribution of contributions directly into the hands of the intended recipients throughout Afghanistan. Founded in the United States in 1998—and registered in both the United States and Afghanistan—ARO is a volunteer humanitarian organization open to people of all backgrounds and faiths. ARO distributes food, medicine, school supplies and basic relief supplies on relief trips. Volunteers pay their own way on relief trips. ARO has no paid staff in the U.S., employs Afghans in Kabul, attempts to ship supplies via humanitarian transports, and utilizes donated warehouse space to collect and sort supplies for shipment. Our efforts are to maximize donor contributions by operating in a responsible and cost effective manner.

**HOW YOU CAN HELP!** ARO relies solely on volunteer help and donations to accomplish our mission. Volunteers pay their own travel expenses on relief trips. Funds are always needed to help with shipping costs of high-value or hard-to-obtain items, and for the purchase of additional relief supplies in the local region. Funds are needed for TEC operations and maintenance, and to develop new aid programs. Your contribution can help continue the efforts of ARO to provide relief and self-sustainability to people throughout Afghanistan. For more information, please contact ARO at [info@afghanrelief.com](mailto:info@afghanrelief.com) or visit our website at [www.afghanrelief.com](http://www.afghanrelief.com).

**DONATIONS:** ARO is a registered 501c3 non-profit, and your financial donations are tax deductible as allowable by the federal IRS code. Your contribution for general relief aid can be made out to “*Afghanistan Relief Organization*”. If you wish specifically to contribute to a particular project, please identify it on the subject line of your check. Your tax-deductible donation can be mailed to: Afghanistan Relief Organization, P.O. Box 866, Cypress, CA 90630. A receipt will be mailed to you, if you provide a return address.