

December 14th, 2021



Afghan Institute of Learning

A message from Dr. Yacoobi...

I had hoped for a better year. I can say for certain I did not anticipate watching my beloved Afghanistan collapse into chaos and heartbreak. After the official withdrawal of the U.S from Afghanistan, no one could predict what came next. When the Afghan government collapsed, surrendering our nation to the rule of Emirates, I felt my life's work crumble into nothing and was terrified that our 30 years of hard work and great progress in rebuilding our nation would be erased.

What was the cost of this war? Humanity.

Innocent lives were lost, homes taken or destroyed, all while violence and anger swept through the Afghan nation. War is not an impartial killer. Women and children are always the ultimate sacrifice to this game of man. Afghanistan is no exception to this truth. Hunger and trauma are now the constant companions of our women and children.

From the very start of the year, while COVID continued to ravage the country, Afghanistan was hit by a brutal drought that impacted more than half of the country. Facing increasing food shortages, job layoffs, and shutdowns, many breadwinning men became frustrated and families became desperate. Violence against women, domestic abuse, early child marriage, child labor and trafficking were all on the rise.

When the U.S confirmed their commitment to leave, my people panicked. While COVID and the drought stalked our people, America and NATO left. Our people had never felt more alone, abandoned and afraid. The Taliban advance was documented by the press all over the world, but where I felt it most was the overwhelming reports and daily calls from my team in Afghanistan. They brought me news of malnourished children who arrived at our gates protected in the arms of their breathless parents. Breathless because they were forced to run through the streets as rockets and bullets slammed into the homes around them, just to reach the safety of our gates.

Facing violence, rape, murder, harassment and starvation, minority families had no choice but to abandon their homes and flee. School administrators negotiated with local elders for security outside of our learning centers for the injured, hungry and fearful children who were left roaming the streets with nothing and nowhere to go as their families were taken or killed.

Our colleagues at the health clinics and health posts experienced increasing numbers of malnourished children. Afghans from villages near and far were flooding our clinics, begging for help, as we were one of few health centers with doors still open. Our facilities were overrun with internally displaced people who arrived in the village and were directed by locals to our clinics or schools. They trust us to care for those running from war. There were far too many children injured or plagued with illnesses due to lack of proper water and food so we continued to hand out school supplies, medicine, clothing and food. We sent the children to the relative safety of our classrooms and provided as many tents as we could for shelter just outside our facilities, which are now surrounded by homeless and hungry families.

The Ghani government ran away, taking with them the country's assets and what little hope we had left. Silence dropped across Afghanistan as the Taliban took over the presidential palace. The entire nation held its breath as attacks across the provinces increased in ferocity and timing. Every day another village fell to Taliban forces, and soon they held all the land crossing routes. The only way out was through Taliban manned gates, or by air.

Meanwhile, AIL built new fences around our facilities, increased security, and sent what we could to the remote areas. We started praying and begged for all of you to pray with us. Our resilient women picked up their signs and protested for peace and their human rights. After that, we waited. We waited, every moment of every day to hear if our schools or offices will be attacked, or if my beloved staff remain safe and secure. I was left wondering if our women, teaching peace and democracy, teaching health and law, would be safe when I woke up. Would the Taliban snatch them off the street? We waited and waited but heard nothing. We received nothing but increasing pressure from the community as the schools remain closed, and so I sent a statement out, reiterating our commitment to build schools. The Emirates responded by reopening our schools and learning centers. We can breathe a bit. But still, the struggle continues as the country's banks are closed and there is no food, no medicine. We continue to hold on.

During those dark days, as I cried for hours, with my despair overwhelming me, is when you reached out. One after another of you - so many I couldn't keep up with. A dizzying number of people from all over the world have donated, supported, advocated for my people, and have given me strength to keep going. Sending everything you could, even if it was a sacrifice. As I stood weeping, your love poured over me, and I knew we would go on, no matter what.

Now that the bombs have stopped falling, AIL stands strong. We have expanded our learning centers curriculum to continue to teach our girls after the 6th grade. We will open two new medical clinics, as the acute shortages of the past two years show a glaring need for them. Since the Emirates demand only female teachers for female students, we will train more teachers. We will do whatever it takes to protect and empower our people to have the ability to create a better future for themselves and for our country.

As I reflect on this past year I realize it was one of my most difficult experiences. Through the heartbreak, devastation, fear and uncertainty, there were many days I felt hopeless. Nights when I could hear the cries of the millions of people in my country who needed help. I hold immense pride in what AIL was able to achieve, and never did I doubt their abilities to succeed, but I had no guarantee that we were safe from the new threat imposed on our people.

As I said when the Ghani government fell, and I still believe; you cannot kill whispers in the wind. A dream cannot be destroyed, not if we envision it still. No matter what it costs, or what methods we have to use, from mobile literacy programs to television and radio, classrooms or learning centers or tents in refugee camps, we will hand children books. We will teach them to read, write, and do math. We will teach them to dream. It is our job to assure them that they can achieve their dreams of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

We don't all pray or believe the same way, and we all have different ways to seek our strength. My belief is in God and all of you who kept me strong with your compassion and love. Without you, AIL would not be the extraordinary organization it is today. Thank you for making this possible, and for being the greatest hope for millions of women, men and children that yearn for their beautiful country to find peace. May the coming year bring us brighter days, greater blessings and joy inshAllah (god willing)

With my deepest gratitude, love & prayers to all,

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi

President & Executive Director, Sakena Fund (formerly Creating Hope International)

President & Executive Director, Afghan Institute of Learning



AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING

2021 ANNUAL UPDATE



YEAR AT A GLANCE

AIL had hopes for a better year, expecting some relief, as our nation barely survived the battle against COVID. However, the little peace and security we had was taken. As severe drought starved our nation, Afghans endured increasing food shortages, COVID cases, and job lay offs. Then came the devastating collapse of our nation... we were overwhelmed by the heart breaking consequences of yet another war that came with the greatest cost to our people.

Now with COVID lockdowns lifted, women and children are still too afraid to leave home. Our Radio and TV stations have never been so vital. We are using all of our media resources to build programming that will provide high quality educational content focused on health, education, and legal rights.

Due to the desperate needs of our communities who heavily rely on us for relief, the past 2 years have forced us to rapidly expand into providing urgent humanitarian aid. The people trust in AIL and we cannot turn anyone away. We have provided aid to thousands who tell us they could not have survived otherwise.

Even under the new government, AIL stands strong. Our staff was given permission to continue our work, so we have. In every way possible, with any necessary adjustments, AIL will continue its mission no matter the circumstance.



IN THE CLASSROOM...

Our facilities have been forced to adhere to new leadership requirements. Thankfully, girl's education has not been banned, although they must be taught by female teachers. In response to the new requirements, we have redesigned our classrooms so that they are separated by gender and we have expanded the curriculum offered in our Women's Learning Centers to ensure that our girls still receive an education past the 6th grade.

AIL will never stop teaching girls and women. Whether in tents, at home, openly or secretly, we will continue to empower through education. Taliban statements drive a great need for more female teachers. Therefore, AIL plans to train as many female teachers as possible to ensure that there are no excuses for our girls to continue learning.

HEALTH CLINICS

While the COVID pandemic already necessitated changes at AIL clinics in regards to sanitation procedures and increasing capacity, several other local clinics shutdown. Recent events have resulted in thousands of displaced families traveling through our provinces. Our clinicians have noticed a rapid increase in severe malnutrition, injury and disease. Our clinics are some of few left open, and have been overflowing with Afghans from villages far and near desperate for medical care.



In response to the lack of relief or assistance since the collapse of the government, AIL has quickly expanded our humanitarian aid program. With food shortages far past acute, prices skyrocketing, and a great number of internally displaced people, there is more need than help available. Our clinics and schools have tent cities around them filled with mostly women, children and elderly who came to us with nothing, in need of food, shelter & clothing.

OTHER ACTIVITY

AIL was able to continue its skills training workshops. We held 3 reproductive health workshops for 150 women. 270 teachers attended methodology workshops with another 107 participating in other education workshops. 727 students attended peace and leadership type workshops. AIL's free Legal Clinic assisted 73 clients through the year. AIL also expanded it's mobile literacy program.



Dr. Yacoobi was featured in several interviews & articles across the world in response to the current crisis in AFG. She had lectures at a few prestigious universities this year, as her travel was limited by the COVID pandemic. "While we are afraid, we are not defeated... Ideas do not disappear so easily. One cannot kill whispers on the wind; The Taliban cannot crush a dream. We will prevail, even if it takes longer than we wanted it to."

OUTREACH

- 6 Active Health Clinics
- 8 Hours of TV content
- 12 Provinces reached
- 22 Daily Radio Broadcasts
- 50 Covid-19 hospital beds
- 23,905 Students Reached
- 13,050 Families Fed
- 15,312 Units of PPE distributed
- 59,888 Health education recipients
- 95,593 Patients Treated



BON STUDENTS

Fortunately, the Bon Center in India has remained COVID-19 free. The 166 students continued with their studies with distance learning



for a few months and then returned to the classroom in August. Sakena Fund supports students from poor families, living in Nepal and Tibet, who come to the center to gain a quality education.



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formerly Creating Hope International

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