

2005 NED Democracy Awards Program Tribute

For more than two decades following the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghanistan experienced an almost indescribable national tragedy - first the war against the Soviet invader that left the country in ruins, its economy shattered and millions of its people maimed by landmines or driven into exile; then the devastating civil war in which tens of thousands died and whole communities were reduced to rubble; and finally, the rule of the Taliban, which subjected the entire population to a harsh theocratic dictatorship and turned the country into a launching ground for international terrorism.

The liberation of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks upon the United States has given the Afghan people the opportunity for national rebirth. They have seized this opportunity by adopting a new constitution and voting in overwhelming numbers in last October's historic presidential election, in defiance of terrorist threats to their safety. But they still face the awesome challenges of rebuilding the country's infrastructure, reviving its economy, unifying the population around a common national vision, and building stable democratic institutions.

In meeting these challenges, Afghans need and deserve the sustained support of the United States and other democracies. But the decisive contribution to Afghanistan's rebirth must come from the people themselves, working through organizations of civil society devoted to the education and empowerment of all Afghans, including women and youth. The NED is proud to present its 2005 Democracy Award to the leaders

of three such organizations:

- **Ms. Sakena Yacoobi**, the founder and Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning, which provides education and health services to more than 350,000 needy Afghans, especially women and children, acting on the belief that educated and self-reliant people are the key to Afghanistan's future;
- **Mr. Mohammad Nasib**, the Managing Director of the Welfare Association for Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), which seeks to promote democracy and national unity by fostering collaboration among all segments of the population, especially by training and organizing *maliks*, the traditional local leaders who encourage active participation from the grassroots of Afghan society; and
- **Mr. Sarwar Hussaini**, the Chairman and Director of the Cooperation Center for Afghanistan, which monitored human rights from within Afghanistan during the Taliban period and which today helps Afghans recover from the physical and psychological ravages of war by providing skills-based training to the most needy Afghans, including widows and children.

Working with countless other Afghans committed to building a democratic and tolerant society, these three individuals have demonstrated unusual courage, determination and vision. For their service to the democratic rebirth of Afghanistan, the National Endowment for Democracy is honored to present its 2005 Democracy Award to Sakena Yacoobi, Mohammad Nasib and Sarwar Hussaini.

The **Democracy Award** is given annually by the National Endowment for Democracy's Board of Directors to recognize the courageous and creative work of individuals and organizations that has advanced the cause of human rights and democracy around the world.