

LIECHTENSTEIN GOVERNMENT PLEDGES \$20,000 TO TRAIN 60 AFGHAN
TEACHERS AND SUPPORT GIRLS' EDUCATION

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Kabul, Afghanistan and Washington, DC: The Liechtenstein Development Service has awarded 25,000 Swiss Francs (\$20,000) to the Oruj Learning Center (OLC), a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), to train 60 primary school teachers in southeast Afghanistan.

The grant is the first tranche of a \$45,000 grant, and was announced by the Ambassador for Liechtenstein in Washington, Claudia Fritsche, who passed the proposal from Oruj onto the authorities in Liechtenstein. "It is a well-known fact that every society benefits in a multitude of ways by investing in the education of women and girls. I am very happy that Liechtenstein can make a contribution to this end," said the Ambassador.

The project is an extension of Oruj's program of girls' education in the Afghan provinces of Wardak and Nangarhar, where Oruj is supporting the education of around 1,000 girls in four schools. The latest reports from the schools were posted on AP's website this week.

The 60 teachers will come from Wardak and Nangarhar, and include 19 teachers and three principals whose salaries are paid by Oruj. They will be trained over the next five months in Jalalabad and Kabul by trainers under Oruj's direction. According to Sadiqa Basiri, the Director of Oruj, roughly a quarter of the teachers will be women.

The Liechtenstein grant comes after a year in which education efforts in Afghanistan have come under fierce attack by the resurgent Taliban. According to estimates, 120 schools have been burned down this year, and hundreds more closed down after teachers received threatening letters. Some letters have accused schools of teaching "western ideas" and offered bounties of 30,000 Afghani (\$600) for each woman teacher killed, and 20,000 (\$400) Afghani for each male teacher.

Last summer, two of the Godah school tents and seven of the nine tents at Noor Khel school were burned down. The attacks appear to have been linked to land disputes, rather than politically motivated, but they put further pressure on the Oruj program.

In spite of such challenges, girls' education remains one of Afghanistan's great successes of the past five years, with around two million girls now in school. Sadiqa Basiri started the Godah school with 30 girls in an abandoned mosque in 2003. Today, the school has 133 students and 95 percent passed their exams this year - 18 with distinction.

Much of this is due to motivated families. Some children walk several miles to school each day, and have missed only a handful of days this year. At the Noor Khel school, students have been

forced to take classes in the open air since the school tents were destroyed. Oruj is seeking funds to buy new tents before the winter sets in.

Education pioneers like Ms. Basiri say that demand for education has also increased since a new government directive requiring all primary schools to add three new grades (ages 13 to 16). This has made education available to boys and girls in villages that did not have secondary schools. This is particularly important in Wardak, where prior to the change there were just 24 girls in secondary school as opposed to 3,000 boys.

Oruj has introduced many innovations and improvements to meet the demand and improve standards. It has hired two women teachers for the Godah school - the first-ever women to teach in the valley of 18 villages. Ms. Basiri has also recruited some of the best students to instruct struggling class-mates during the vacation, in return for credit.

The Advocacy Project has supported Oruj since 2003 with promotion, strategic planning and project implementation. The Liechtenstein proposal was written by Ms. Basiri and Alison Long, a graduate at American University who was recruited by AP to intern with Oruj this summer. AP has sent five interns to Afghanistan since 2003.

AP is currently helping Oruj to raise funds to cover the cost of replacing the Noor Khel tents, and teacher salaries through to June of 2007. AP is also managing a pen-pal exchange between the Oruj students in Afghanistan, and students from the Squannacook Primary School in Townsend, Massachusetts.

This program was launched by the Squannacook students at "A Night of Peace" last December. The latest batch of letters from Afghanistan are being translated and will shortly be sent to the American pen-pals.

- [Read the summer blogs of Alison Long](#)