

## **FEBRUARY 2023 SPEAKER**

### **DR. LAURYN OATES - AFGHANISTAN TODAY**

"A lot has changed in Afghanistan in the year and a half since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, mostly for the worse but it's not an entirely hopeless situation," Dr. Oates, executive director of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (CW4WAfghan), told us. She expressed appreciation for UWCNY's and all of CFUW's support.

The organization's focus is on ensuring Afghan girls and women access to quality education, which it regards as essential for the entire country's wellbeing. "Afghanistan is the only country in the world that bans women and girls from an education," she said. "The whole population is paying the price, not women only; it's one of the most dramatic regressions ever. Look at it pragmatically: it's bad for everyone's health since female doctors and nurses aren't allowed and bad for the economy since women were fired. The country's economic gains over the previous twenty years have been wiped out. Microfinance, which mainly went to women, was stopped. Women had accounted for five percent of GDP."

She continued: "I did an analysis in 2012 for UNICEF that measured 'progress' by Afghan women since the Taliban lost power in 2001. From the mother's education level I saw that it can be predicted what will happen with her children. Children of educated mothers completed school, didn't suffer malnutrition, and were properly vaccinated. There were books in the home and sanitation was better."

She acknowledged: "It's unrealistic that the Taliban will be pushed out of power." But she pointed out that CW4WAfghan and other organizations are circumventing their draconian rule through modern technology. "The internet and social media have made possible virtual learning," she said. "Tech for education." It needn't be solitary, she said. CW4WAfghan has developed a "virtual classroom." She said that so far, the Taliban haven't cracked down because the virtual learning is "home based and the Taliban want women to stay home." She added, "Virtual learning is a website, remotely operated, not physically in Afghanistan."

CW4WAfghan also provides scholarships, electronically links learners to Afghan teachers who left the country in the "diaspora," and includes hygiene and nutrition information in educational materials kits it distributes.

Lauryn is optimistic. "It's a serious crisis but important change often comes on the heels of crises. One definition of 'crisis' is 'turning point' which can be for the better. That's why it's important to help."

*Susan Goldenberg*

[www.cw4wafghan.ca/AdvocateNow](http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/AdvocateNow)

Dr. Oates was asked about "SOLA" and said, "It's wonderful." Here's the link to a segment on 60 minutes on Sunday Feb. 26

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sola-afghanistan-education-60-minutes-2023-02-26/>

AFGHAN WOMEN- EDUCATION - 60 MINUTES, Sunday Feb. 26, 2023