

## **Dr. Sakena Yacoobi**

### **Bio**

**Dr. Sakena Yacoobi** is the founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning, the Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private Hospital in Herat, the Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private High Schools in Kabul (2) and Herat (2), Afghanistan and the radio station, *Meraj* in Herat Province, Afghanistan.

Dr. Yacoobi is also co-founder and Vice-President of Creating Hope International, a Michigan-based non-profit organization.

Dr. Yacoobi is Executive Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), an Afghan women-led NGO she founded in 1995. The organization was established to provide teacher training to Afghan women, to support education for boys and girls, and to provide health education to women and children. Under Sakena's leadership AIL has established itself as a groundbreaking, visionary organization which works at the grassroots level and empowers women and communities to find ways to bring education and health services to rural and poor urban girls, women and other poor and disenfranchised Afghans. AIL was the first organization to offer human rights and leadership training to Afghan women. AIL supported 80 underground home schools for 3,000 girls in Afghanistan after the Taliban closed girls' schools in the 1990s. AIL was the first organization that opened Learning Centers for Afghan women—a concept now copied by many organizations throughout Afghanistan. Recently, AIL opened a Legal Clinic to provide free legal services to poor Afghan women and has been hosting large scale peace conferences around Afghanistan, which use the poetry of the Afghan poet Rumi to teach lessons of justice, human rights, good citizenship and living harmoniously.

Using their grassroots strategies and holistic approach, AIL now serves hundreds of thousands of women and children each year through its training programs, Learning Centers, schools and clinics in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 1996, 13 million Afghans have benefited from AIL's education and health programs.

Sakena and AIL have received international recognition for their efforts on behalf of Afghan women and children. In 2001, Sakena was awarded the Bill Graham award from the Rex Foundation in recognition of the efforts of the Afghan Institute of Learning to assist children who are victims of political oppression and human rights violations. AIL and Dr. Yacoobi are co-recipients of the 2003 Peacemakers in Action Award of the Tanenbaum Center for Inter-religious Understanding and the 2004 Women's Rights Prize of the Peter Gruber Foundation. Sakena and AIL have received recognition of service awards from the Ministry of Education in Herat, Afghanistan, the district governments of Mir Bacha Kot, Shakardara, Kalakan, Farza, and sixth district Kabul Afghanistan and from numerous Afghan organizations.

In 2005, Prof. Yacoobi was awarded the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy. Sakena was among the 1,000 women nominated to jointly receive the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. In 2006, Sakena received the Citizen Leader Award from the University of the

Pacific in Stockton, California and the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. In January 2007, Sakena was inducted as a Senior Fellow, the first Ashoka Fellow from Afghanistan. In May 2007, Sakena was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws by the University of the Pacific for her leadership and human rights work for women and children. In December 2007, Sakena received the 2007 Gleitsman International Activist Award at Harvard University. In June 2008, Sakena received an honorary Doctor of Humanitarian Service degree from Loma Linda University, recognizing her distinguished contribution to society. In February 2009, Sakena received the 2009 Americans for UNFPA Board of Advocates Award for the Health and Dignity of Women. Sakena was cited by Americans for UNPFA as a tireless advocate for Afghan women, who has increased the literacy and improved the health of thousands of Afghan women and girls despite decades of armed conflict and a ban on girls education during Taliban rule.

In March 2009, Sakena received the Henry R. Kravis Prize in Leadership for her outstanding work. In June 2010, Sakena gave the graduation commencement speech and received an honorary doctorate of education from Santa Clara University for her work in providing preschool through post-secondary education for Afghan women and children. Also in 2010 Sakena was awarded the 2010 Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights, the Asia Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the Schwab foundation, and the Global Hero Award from the University of the Pacific. 2011 brought the honor of being awarded the Afghan National Peace Award. In 2012 Sakena was thrilled to be honored with the German Media Award, the Lotus Leadership Award from The Asia Foundation, and the World's Children's Prize Honorary Award. In 2013, Sakena was presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Princeton University. Also in 2013, Sakena was awarded the Global Generation Award from the Millennium Campus Network, and the Good Deals Pioneer Award. 2013 ended with Sakena being honored with the prestigious Opus Prize, which is awarded to social entrepreneurs of any faith who are solving the world's most pressing problems. In February 2014, Direct Relief presented Sakena with the Champion for Women's Health Award and in May she was awarded with an honorary Doctor of Human Letters degree from the University of St. Joseph. In November 2015, Dr. Yacoobi was named the 2015 WISE Prize for Education Laureate. In March 2016, Dr. Yacoobi received the 2016 Harold W. McGraw, Jr Prize in Education (International) and in May 2016, she received an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. In 2017, Dr. Yacoobi was named as one of the Sunhak Peace Prize Laureates. In addition, in 2017, she received a medal of appreciation from the Afghan Senate; Dr. Yacoobi has been chosen to have her picture on the citizenship wall in the Afghan Presidential Palace as one of the top civilian and cultural women in Afghanistan; BBC named her as one of 100 inspirational and innovative women. Lastly, AIL's Mobile Literacy Project has been chosen to be in Expo2020.

In addition to her work with AIL, Sakena has been a panelist, TEDWomen speaker and speaker on education for women and children at a number of international conferences, including the Clinton Global Initiative, California Governor's Conference on Women and Families, the Central Eurasian Studies Society conference at Harvard University, the One World Forum at Warwick University in England, Association for Women in Development in Bangkok, and the

International Institute for Peace Education in South Korea, Turkey, Greece and Costa Rica, the World Economic Forum in Davos, The D.D. Kosimbi Festival of Ideas in Goa, India, The World Justice Forum in The Hague and the UN DIP Conference in Australia, the TEDWomen Conference in Monterey, CA, the Brookings US-Islamic World Forum, the World Humanitarian Summit, the seventh World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), the Muntada public forum event of The Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation in the UAE, the 2016 Women Deliver Conference, the Teach First 2016 and REAL2016 in the UK and the UNESCO introduction of GEM in the UK. In 2017, Dr. Yacoobi spoke at Raisina Dialogue in India; a speaker at the World Summit in South Korea; a speaker at the 21<sup>st</sup> Middle Eastern Women Conference in Austria and participated in the U.S. Islamic World Forum. She has been instrumental in carrying the voice of Afghan women to the world and focusing attention on the urgent need for women's rights, education and healthcare in Afghanistan.

Born in Herat, Afghanistan, Sakena came to the United States in the 1970s, earning a bachelor's degree in biological sciences from the University of the Pacific and a master's degree in public health from Loma Linda University. Before returning in 1992 to work with her people, Sakena was a professor at D'Etre University and a health consultant. While working with refugees in Pakistan, she published eight Dari-language teacher training guides. During that time, she also served as the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) delegate working on the education portion of the United Nation's Rehabilitation Plan for Afghanistan.

Her affiliations include the following:

Afghan Institute of Learning, Founder and Executive Director \* Afghan National Coordinating Body \* Afghan Women's Law Group \* Afghan Women's Network \* Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, Member & Former Steering Committee Member \* AWID \* Creating Hope International, Vice President \* Global Fund for Women, Former Board Member \* Global Fund for Women Advisor \* Global Peace Initiative for Women, member of Contemplative Alliance \* Henry J. Kravis Prize in Leadership, Nomination Advisor \* The International Museum of Women \* Millennium Campus Network, Board of Advisors and Co-Chair for the National Conference \* Monterey Institute of International Studies at Middlebury College, Center for Social Impact Learning Advisory Council Member \* The Muslims Women's Fund, member Global Advisory Network, \* New Global Citizens Board Member \* Opportunity Collaboration Steering Committee Member \* The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation, Advisor on the Women's Rights Prize committee \* Policy Council on Afghan Women, Steering Committee Member \* Sisterhood Is Global Institute \* University of the Pacific, Former Global Center Advisory Board member \* US-Afghan Women's Council \* Vital Voices \* Women's Refugee Commission, Commissioner \* World Affairs Council of Northern California \* World Economic Forum—Education Expert \* Member of 1000 Peace Women Organization