

## **Dr. Sakena L.Yacoobi**

### **Biography**

**Dr. Sakena Yacoobi** is the founder of a number of institutions in Afghanistan. She founded the NGO - the Afghan Institute of Learning, the Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private Hospital in Herat, four Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private High Schools, two in Kabul and two in Herat and the private station, Radio Meraj in Herat. Dr. Yacoobi is also co-founder and Executive Director of Creating Hope International, a non-profit organization based in Michigan, USA.

#### Afghan Institute of Learning

Dr. Yacoobi is Executive Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), an Afghan 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 came to power and closed girls' schools, 1996-2001. 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. It 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.

AIL uses grassroots strategies and a holistic approach and now serves hundreds of thousands of women and children each year through its training program, Learning Centers, schools and health and legal clinics. Since 1996, millions of Afghans have been impacted, either directly or indirectly, by AIL's education, training and health programs.

## Recognition

Sakena and AIL have received national and 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 Sakena were co-recipients of the 2003 Peacemakers in Action Award from 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 of Kabul Afghanistan as well as from numerous Afghan organizations.

In 2005, Sakena was awarded the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy. She was among the 1,000 women nominated to jointly receive the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. In 2006, she 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 Ashoka Fellow, the first Ashoka Fellow from Afghanistan.

In May 2007, Sakena received an honorary degree, Doctor of Laws from the University of the Pacific for her leadership and human rights work for women and children. In December 2007, she 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 was awarded 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 was honored with the Henry R. Kravis Prize in Leadership for her outstanding work.

In June 2010, she gave the graduation commencement speech and received an honorary degree, Doctor of Education from Santa Clara University for her work providing preschool through post-secondary education to 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 awarded the German Media Award, the Lotus Leadership Award from The Asia Foundation, and a 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. In May that year, she was presented with an honorary Doctor of Human Letters degree from the University of St. Joseph.

In November 2015, Sakena was named the 2015 WISE Prize for Education Laureate. In March 2016, she received the 2016 Harold W. McGraw, Jr Prize in Education (International). In May, she received an honorary Doctor in Human Letters degree from Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

In 2017, Sakena was named as one of the Sunhak Peace Prize Laureates. In addition, that year she received a medal of appreciation from the Afghan Senate. She has her picture on the Citizenship Wall in the Afghan Presidential Palace recognized as one of the top civilian and cultural women in Afghanistan. The BBC named her as one of 100 inspirational and innovative women 2017. That same year AIL's Mobile Literacy Project was chosen to be in Expo2020. In November 2017, Sakena received the Sri Sathya Sai Award for Human Excellence in Education. In July 2018, she received the 2018 AMI Humanitarian Award from Al-Mahdi Institute, Birmingham, UK, *"in honor of her outstanding contribution towards establishing the Afghan Institute of Learning and facilitating the training of women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan"*. In October 2018, she

received the TRT World Citizen Educator Award 2018 in Istanbul, Turkey, *“for her outstanding work in education”*.

In September 2019, Sakena received the International Sensation Award, which *“recognizes the extraordinary achievement of a South Asian on a global scale”*, in Vancouver, BC, Canada from Darpan Magazine. In October 2019, at the Arab American National Museum, in Dearborn, MI, Sakena was awarded the Wayne State University, Global Peacemaker Award.

In February 2020, Sakena was presented with the Stand Up Leadership Award at the International Convention 2020 in Dallas, TX. In April 2020, Sakena was named an Aurora Humanitarian by the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity.

#### Speaker and Panelist

In addition to her work with ALL, Sakena has been a panelist and speaker at numerous international conferences and events on the subjects of education for women and children, media and peace and refugees among other subjects. She is also a TEDWomen speaker.

Conferences include: 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 the Raisina Dialogue in India; was 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. In 2018, Dr. Yacoobi was a featured speaker at the Africa Summit 2018 in Dakar, Senegal; was a panelist on “The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict” at TRT World Forum in Istanbul, Turkey. She spoke on “*Transforming the World with the Power of Women and Girls*” at the Future of Innovation Conference at the University of New Brunswick, Canada; spoke to students, faculty and staff in the College of Education at Purdue University on the “*Challenges of Education in Afghanistan*”, and she spoke as a plenary speaker on “*Weaving Traditions and Wisdom to Bring Peace to Afghanistan*” at the Parliament of World Religions conference in Toronto, Canada, where she was also on several panels. She spoke at the Generator 2018 event in Toronto, Canada; and was keynote speaker at the Flying High Trust Annual Meeting in UK.

In 2019, Dr. Yacoobi gave speeches in Seoul, South Korea, Loma Linda University, Austin, Texas, and Windsor, Ontario, Canada, about *women and peace, the importance of education for girls and women and inspiring women to create change*. In November, she spoke at the Mohonk Consultations Peace Conference on Women, Education and Peace and at the Asbar World Forum, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Media in the Future.

In 2020, Dr. Yacoobi was a panelist at the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) World Summit 2020 for the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace Forum on “Realizing World Peace through Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity, and Universal Values”. Additionally, the keynote speaker at the IAPD (Interreligious Association for Peace and Development) Session V at UPF World Summit 2020. In February 2020, Sakena spoke 4 times at the International Convention in Dallas, TX at the Leadership Luncheon, Community Reception, Foundation LEADS Plenary, and Foundation Leadership Lab. The speeches focused on the new generation of youth leaders, civic engagement, diversity, and the environment.

Sakena has devoted her life to the Afghan people and been instrumental in carrying the voice of Afghan women to the world, focusing attention on the urgent need for women’s rights, education, training, healthcare and peace in Afghanistan and the world since 1995.

## Personal

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 to Afghanistan in 1992 to work with her people, Sakena was a professor at D'Etire 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 delegate for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) 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 \* Council of Stakeholders—Social Impact Lab: Lynn University \* Creating Hope International, Executive Director \* 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 \* 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.

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