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From right: Kuwait Ambassador Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, US First Lady Laura Bush, actor Michael Douglas and Rima Al-Sabah, wife of the ambassador pose together during the Kuwait American Foundation benefit dinner to benefit the rehabilitation of schools in Afghanistan, in Washington, March 8, 2006. (KUNA)

Kuwaiti Envoy Hosts Function

Glitz and Standing O's

WASHINGTON, March 9, (KUNA): A unique Kuwaiti humanitarian effort to support educational programs in Afghanistan witnessed a big success at a grand reception, organized by Kuwait's Ambassador Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and his spouse Sheikha Rima and held late on Wednesday under auspices of the US First Lady Laura Bush.

Sponsored by the Washington-based Kuwait-America Foundation (KAF), the fundraising reception, themed "Bridges of Hope," announced a sum of one million dollars that will go to the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF), which will supervise projects aimed at improving the quality of education in Afghanistan.

In addition to Laura Bush, the reception, held at the Ambassador's residence, was attended by a number of dignitaries as guests of honor including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the Oscar-winning actor Michael Douglas and his wife Catherine Zeta-Jones, an internationally recognized actress as well.

First Lady Laura Bush expressed her appreciation for the organization of such an important event, and said such a humanitarian event, organized and sponsored by Kuwait, was highly meaningful for the people of Afghanistan who she said deserved to live hopeful and in peace.

"I am grateful that we are all working together to help a nation of good and hopeful people find the peace and success they deserve," she said.

"Programs that train teachers are especially important, and I want to thank the partnerships like UNICEF, the Kuwait-America Foundation, and all of the others that are working to make sure boys and girls are educated in Afghanistan," she said.

This is the second such humanitarian initiative launched by the wife of the Ambassador, who organized last year a fundraising ceremony dedicated to helping many Iraqi refugees who fled from years of oppression under Saddam Hussein's regime, return to their country.

"This ceremony reflects the fact that Kuwait, officially and privately, attaches paramount importance to helping those in need worldwide. It also translates the fact that Kuwait is continuously committed to extending all-out support to efforts aimed at improving education in countries that prevented this sector from playing its vital role in building their societies," the Kuwaiti Ambassador Sheikh Salem told KUNA.

Sheikh Salem, in a speech to the guests, expressed profound appreciation to the humanitarian role the First Lady plays worldwide, saying "this important role reminds us that we have a responsibility to take care of the children."

Sheikh Salem recalled the visit by the First Lady to Afghanistan last year as a visit that "demonstrated the selfless spirit of America."

"The Kuwaiti people know this spirit well. It saved us from tyranny not many years ago. We owe a special debt of gratitude to this country and we will always remember the sacrifices America made on behalf of our freedom. You brought hope to our people just as you are now bringing hope to the people of Afghanistan and many other nations around the world," Sheikh Salem said in his speech.

At the ceremony, the First Lady received a "Humanitarian Award" sponsored by the KAF and the UNICEF in recognition of her role in addressing humanitarian crises and in her relentless efforts in supporting education, fighting poverty and enforcing equality.

The First Lady Laura Bush, after receiving the award, thanked both the Kuwait-America foundation for sponsoring the event and the Embassy of Kuwait for organizing the ceremony, which she described as yet another relentless effort that would make the future of Afghanistan promising.

"Thanks to the work of organizations like UNICEF and the Kuwait-America Foundation, the future holds great promise for men, women, and children in Afghanistan," the First Lady said.

"And I want everyone here to know, and especially the people of Afghanistan, that the United States are steadfast partners in their development," she said.

The US Secretary of State also received a "Public Service Award" in recognition for her peace-making efforts worldwide.

Rice described the Kuwaiti campaign as "commendable" and said it is a new opportunity that would give the children of Afghanistan a better and quality education.

The Oscar-winning Actor Michael Douglas, who was also awarded with the "Private Citizen" award for his humanitarian role worldwide, expressed in his speech pride receiving this award, and thanked the KAF for choosing him as one of the guests of honor.

Douglas, who was appointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1998 as a messenger for peace, stressed on the important role of UNICEF in helping many countries improve the quality level of education to their people.

The UNICEF's executive Director, Ann Veneman, praised Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah and the KAF for organizing and sponsoring such an important humanitarian event, which she said comes in response to the determination of the people of Afghanistan to establish a quality education in their country.

"UNICEF and our partners will continue to rely on the generosity of individuals and organizations, such as the Kuwait-America Foundation, to do that work," she said

The Kuwait-American Foundation was represented at the ceremony by Faisal Al-Mutawwa, who spoke at the ceremony reiterating KAF's commitment to continuing to lend all kinds of support to UNICEF's work.