

A Partnership for Hope

CELEBRATING the 60th anniversary of UNICEF and INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

BY ANN VENEMAN



First Lady **Laura Bush**, Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** and actor **Michael Douglas**

Afghans are not strangers to violence. Theirs is a country that has suffered decades of war and depredation at the brutal hands of the Taliban. Afghan girls—fully half of the country's children—had been prohibited from getting an education, while a few courageous teachers conducted lessons in secret. This enforced ignorance and conflict have resulted in poverty, illiteracy and poor health. But while Afghans have known a violent past, there is a crucial difference today: The people of Afghanistan are fighting back, and the battleground they have chosen is education. Raihana, a 9-year-old Afghan girl whose school was hit by rockets, symbolizes the determination of her country. When asked if the attack would deter her from going to school, she emphatically replied, "I am afraid, but I will continue.

When I was appointed the fifth executive director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) last year, my friend **Rima Al-Sabah**, the wife of Kuwait's

ambassador to the United States, and I talked about how we could work together to help children. We decided then that we should partner to help the children in war-torn Afghanistan.

Our discussions led, in part, to a gala dinner on March 8, which will be hosted by Ambassador **Salem Al-Sabah** and Rima at their residence in Washington. The event, "Bridges of Hope: Educating Children for a Better Future," will honor International Women's Day and UNICEF's 60th anniversary, while recognizing several extraordinary people and achievements related to girls' education in Afghanistan. The evening is sponsored by the Kuwait-America Foundation, of which Rima is the benefit chairman and which, last year, partnered with USA for UNHCR to assist Iraqi women and children refugees. The Foundation has now helped raise more than \$1 million for the rehabilitation of schools in Afghanistan.

At the Bridges of Hope gala dinner, First Lady **Laura Bush** will be honored for her deep personal commitment to this cause, along with Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** and Oscar-winning actor **Michael Douglas**. Entertainment will be provided by legendary composer **Marvin Hamlisch** and singer **Roberta Flack**; **George Stephanopoulos** of ABC News will serve as

master of ceremonies.

As we celebrate UNICEF's 60th anniversary, our work to promote education in Afghanistan harkens back to the organization's very beginnings of providing relief in the wake of conflict. UNICEF's efforts in Afghanistan have included providing thousands of tents for temporary classrooms; repairs to hundreds of schools; distribution of thousands of tons of school supplies; repairing or constructing key infrastructure systems such as water and sanitation; helping develop curricula; and ensuring access for girls. But there is still much to do, and the needs remain pressing. 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.

As we gather on March 8 at the Kuwaiti Ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C., children 7,000 miles away on the other end of those "Bridges of Hope" will be preparing for another school year in Afghanistan. **WL**



Rima Al-Sabah



Ann Veneman