



**SO LA**  
**School of Leadership Afghanistan**

*Courage to Grow | Knowledge to Lead | Power to Change*



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**Shabana**, SOLA's new Managing Director, graduated magna cum laude from Middlebury in '11. She built the first school in her ancestral village.

**Only 6% of Afghan women aged 25 or older have ever received formal education...**



**Wazhma** supported her family while she studied in Kabul. She earned a 650 on the TOEFL and is now an honors student as a sophomore at Yale.

## Context: Afghanistan Today and Tomorrow

The desire to create educational and leadership opportunities in Afghanistan is predicated on four beliefs:

- 1 Afghanistan has a future. The most effective antidote to the Taliban is to create the best educated leadership generation in Afghanistan's history. Educated Afghans — men *and* women — must be enabled to create wealth and fix their country *their* way.
- 2 Afghanistan's current leadership generation is burdened with excess baggage from a lifetime of recurrent conflict. Past and current performance indicates that the country is unlikely to make substantive progress in political, societal or economic reform in the near term. Only a new generation with open, progressive minds, easy access to new technologies, and considerable personal courage will effect lasting change.
- 3 The academic and personal achievements of Afghan women who have been educated abroad to date provide credible evidence of their ability to assume leadership of the country in the near future.
- 4 Afghan women have a future. They will return after graduation if given reason. They will use their intellect, integrity, compassion and drive to meet the needs of their country. They are committed to leading their peers out of ignorance and the subservience and poverty that are its inevitable partners.

## Why a School for Afghan Women Leaders

*"What I really want is to see women in Afghanistan not only be a symbol. I want women to be decision-makers, not just at the Ministry of Women's Affairs."*

— Shukria Barakzai, Afghan MP (*Deutsche Welle*, 2010)

Women constitute more than 50% of Afghanistan's population, yet they play a limited role in key decision-making processes. There are three female ministers in the current administration. In 34 provinces, there is one female governor, one woman mayor, and one female chief provincial prosecutor. Women make up about 1% of the National Army and Police and 4.2% of the (low-level) judiciary. In 2007, female labor force participation was a very low 21% and in 2008, 17 of the 36 ministries employed less than 10% females.

Afghanistan's education system ranks among the lowest in the world in terms of educational attainment at every level. In 2007, only 6% of Afghan women aged 25 or older had ever received formal education and only 12% of women aged 15 or older were literate. Among 159,000 students taking university entrance exams in 2012, only 7,000 women passed.

Yet women will be instrumental in rebuilding Afghanistan. Investing in women and girls is "smart economics," shown to lead to real economic growth in developed and developing countries by delaying marriage, reducing the number of children, and fostering positive commitments to the education of those children. In the 2007–2017 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, the government recognized that "promoting women's leadership constitutes one of the prerequisites for building a governance system that is responsive to interests and wellbeing of the citizenry, recognizing that such a governance system cannot be built if half of the population is excluded from taking part in it."

## Mission

SOLA is a people-to-people, non-profit organization dedicated to furthering global educational and Afghan leadership opportunities for the new generation of Afghanistan, especially for women.



**... the generation that can improve—fundamentally improve—the welfare of the Afghan people.**



**Meena Y.**, now at Smith, knows ASL, Dari, English, Pashto & Urdu. At 16, she interviewed girls sprayed with battery acid on their way to school.



**Maryam**, from Miss Hall's to St. Lawrence U. in NY, was one of five women Mrs. Obama invited to the White House for International Women's Day '11.

## Vision

SOLA envisions an Afghanistan with a vibrant, globally competitive, private economy providing opportunity to create substantial, legitimate wealth for both Afghan men and women. An Afghanistan that offers sustainable educational, training and entrepreneurial opportunities to all, thriving in its use of new technologies and operating within the rule of law.

## Objective: A Continuum

SOLA is a small, highly selective, privately funded organization founded in October 2008 to expand educational and leadership opportunities for the new generation of Afghan women. SOLA evolved from a publicly funded, one-year high school cultural exchange program which, unfortunately—but predictably, failed to induce many of its participants to return.

SOLA prepares students for scholarships at competitive schools abroad, from boarding schools to colleges/universities and grad schools. SOLA has facilitated enrolment at schools such as Bates, Middlebury, Mt. Holyoke, Smith, Tufts, Williams, and Yale.

SOLA then helps graduates secure significant public and private sector opportunities on an equal footing with men. This combination is expected to translate into salaries at levels comparable to normal American incomes, without the add-ons that more than double the cost of the expatriates these Afghans will replace.

## Core Values

*Courage to Grow* — SOLA helps ambitious young Afghan women pursue their studies. Women need great courage to pursue education in Afghanistan. Many SOLA students come from uneducated families. Many must hide their ambitions, even their whereabouts, from wider family, neighbors and friends. All demonstrate untiring commitment to pursuing their education. They understand the meaning of education denied. SOLA offers a safe boarding house and extensive college preparation to support these students in their quest.

*Knowledge to Lead* — SOLA supports Afghan women's pursuit of global educational opportunities and leadership skills. To compensate for an antiquated educational system focused on rote learning and memorization, students must acquire the values of critical thinking, creative problem-solving, free inquiry and common sense. SOLA enables a small number of students with exceptional intellectual and leadership qualities gain access to education at the most competitive schools available to any woman, anywhere.

*Power to Change* — SOLA fosters the creation of wealth-generating jobs and the placement of Afghan women in leadership positions. Why would any bright, talented young Afghan with a degree from a well-known international university go back to Afghanistan? Educated young Afghans will return because they are committed to transforming the lives of their families, to creating legitimate wealth through a career in the private or public sectors, and, above all, to leading their country out of its present morass at the bottom of most of the world's social and economic indicators. SOLA students know they are the generation that can improve—fundamentally improve—the welfare of the Afghan people. In order to reach the essential outcome of leadership positions as graduates return to Afghanistan, SOLA opens doors through its established connections and in-country reputation.

## Beneficiaries

SOLA supports young Afghans who are able and committed to becoming Afghanistan's future leaders—who stand out for commitment to changing their world in a multitude of ways. As



**Masooma**, one of the first Afghan women to box, learned to read and write in a village religious school. She hopes to go to high school abroad in '12.



**Sana**, having contracted polio as a child, wrote "Learning how to walk—one hand at a time." She hopes to return to high school in the U.S. in 2012-13.

**SOLA offers students a rigorous academic curriculum as well as extensive training in civic engagement...**



**Najeeb** lost a brother and an eye to a rocket during a presidential election. He is now enrolled at Stowe School in the UK.

representatives of a multiracial, tolerant Afghanistan, students are expected to exhibit originality of thought, openness to new ideas, the ability to think critically, and the drive to succeed. Admission criteria include good academic standing in high school, or academic potential in the case of candidates from underserved areas of Afghanistan.

Scholarship candidates must demonstrate proficiency in English by scoring 560 on the TOEFL (or equivalent) in 2012-13, and 600 in 2014-15. Students preparing for SOLA's international scholarship track receive targeted TOEFL support.

## Activities

In SOLA's boarding school in Kabul, students are offered a rigorous academic curriculum as well as extensive training in civic engagement whereby they:

- Attend regular classes on English reading and writing, exam preparation (i.e., TOEFL), math, and global affairs with volunteer teachers.
- Prepare daily academic assignments, and read and respond to at least one book weekly.
- Learn online through high-tech videoconferencing equipment and interact monthly with U.S. students through Global Nomads Group's civic exchange program.
- Connect in person or via videoconferences with guest speakers such as David Rohde (Reuters columnist and Pulitzer Prize author), Tamim Ansary (Afghan-American author), Rezla Aslan (Iranian-American activist and author), Bilal Sarwary (Afghan BBC reporter and producer), and Arifullah Pashtoon (Afghan Senator from Khost, international affairs committee chair).
- Exchange with personal volunteer mentors and tutors via skype/phone on a daily/weekly basis.
- Engage in periodic volunteer work, such as at a local orphanage or the Red Crescent.
- Participate in ongoing opportunities such as learning how to drive. (Driving is an important component of empowerment and in changing traditional, male-dominated customs.)
- Discover Afghanistan's diverse cultures and ethnicities through field trips.
- Explore local and international governance by visiting institutions such as embassies, courtrooms and police stations, and joining roundtable discussions on current affairs.
- Act to support social justice.

Currently, 23 students (20 girls/3 boys) are enrolled at SOLA in Kabul, with 15 boarders from 10 provinces (Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Herat, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Parwan, and Wardak) and 8 day students from Kabul. They are supported by 18 e-mentors, 10 e-tutors and 13 volunteer teachers from seven countries (Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, USA, and the UK). They have access to laptops and e-readers for academic and personal use. A growing library includes classics by Austen, Dickens, Dumas, Kipling, Lee, Orwell, Steinbeck, Twain, and Verne. Student favorites include *Half the Sky* (Kristoff & WuDunn), *Descent into Chaos* (Rashid), *Post American World* (Zakaria), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Hemingway), and Frost's *Complete Poems*.

SOLA support continues when scholars study abroad, with cultural adaptation and academic challenges alike. Students are matched with host families or guardians, who form a closely knit and administered yet informal exchange network. The scholars themselves form a convivial network that gathers regionally for festivities, conferences, speaking engagements, and commemorative occasions such as graduations and award ceremonies. SOLA's development team continually supports students with summer academic and leadership programs, internships, career counseling, and travel arrangements.



**SOLA has in/directly helped 56 students obtain 69 scholarships to 49 schools estimated at a value of \$10.4 million...**



**Farahnaz**, when denied a visa to attend Westover in CT, was enrolled at Dauntsey's School in the U.K. within one month.



**Fatima** fled to Pakistan when her father and uncle's lives were threatened. She will attend Northfield Mt. Hermon in '12.

The SOLA continuum leads naturally from studying at SOLA to studying abroad and on to legitimate wealth creation in responsible leadership roles within the Afghan public and private sectors. SOLA is a young initiative whose success in supporting students' return home is measurable. To date, three significant positions have been secured by SOLA graduates: one at an NGO, one in a corporation, one within a ministry.

## **Achievements**

SOLA has directly or indirectly helped 59 students obtain 76 scholarships to 54 schools estimated at a value of **\$11.07 million** as of July 2012. These scholarships were awarded to 44 girls and 15 boys from 13 provinces—Balkh, Bamiyan, Dai Kundi, Ghazni, Helmand, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, and Parwan—totaling 233 scholarship years.

## **Governance**

SOLA is a small yet ambitious organization that recognizes its responsibility towards stakeholders who have placed their faith in its efforts. Recognizing transparency and accountability as prerequisites for legitimacy and credibility, and ultimately for sustainable operations, SOLA established effective governance structures as of July 2012.

As a school for Afghan women, SOLA is led and managed by women in Afghanistan and others with strong ties to Afghanistan. It is governed by a Board of Directors, which meets at least once a year, and has all powers to achieve the SOLA mission.

Among other responsibilities, the Board adopts a budget and annual accounts and selects and supervises SOLA's management team. The Board regularly discusses policy objectives and standards. All positions are filled on a voluntary basis. Daily management is delegated to the Managing Director, who also serves as Board member *ex officio*.

## Management Team

SOLA's new Managing Director, **Shabana Basij-Rasikh**, has direct or delegated authority to administer and execute all SOLA activities, including drafting and creating strategic, tactical and financial plans, building organizational capacity, liaising with partners, developing management, and fundraising. Born and raised in Kabul, she completed secondary education at Maryam High School in Kabul and attended grades 10–12 as a YES exchange student in Onalaska, WI. After graduating magna cum laude from Middlebury College in 2011, Shabana became SOLA's first Head of School, in which position she will continue until suitably replaced. She also founded the non-profit *HELA* to build a school in her native Laghman province (an achievement for which she was selected as one of Glamour Magazine's Top 10 College Women of the year 2010), and directs the *Afghan Youth Initiative*.

**Wasima Shinwari** is the Assistant Head of School and Dorm Supervisor. Afghan students who complete SOLA's management team include **Zeinab Noori** and **Fatima Saidi** as GNG Youth Links Project Coordinators, and **Bas Bibi Kakar** as Finance Officer.

## Board of Directors

The management team reports to SOLA's Board of Directors. **Ted Achilles**, SOLA founder and honorary board member, is a retired businessman who began his work in education in Kabul in 2003 as country director of the State Department-funded Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program. Ted established SOLA in October 2008, and now focuses on raising funds and securing scholarships, and creating substantive leadership opportunities for returning SOLA alumnae in the Afghan public and private sectors.



**Khadija** from Dai Kundi lost her hearing in infancy. She now attends the American School for the Deaf in W. Hartford, CT.

**SOLA is a school for Afghan women, led and managed by women in Afghanistan...**



**Zahra** fled the Taliban to Iran. Returning eight years later, her sisters were the first in their area to refuse the burqa. She will attend St. George's in RI.



**Sabira** is an honors junior and dorm proctor at Marianapolis in CT. She received scholarships to Brown in RI for summer 2012.

**Cornelia Schneider** chairs the Board. A UK and US-educated lawyer of German nationality, Connie has lived in Afghanistan since 2009 and serves as Head of Rule of Law Reform at EUPOL Afghanistan. She previously worked with young Muslim leaders in Bosnia, Syria and Saudi Arabia. **Rian Smith** grew up behind the Iron Curtain and in the Middle East and has degrees from Harvard and RISD. Rian worked in public affairs in DC for the Atlantic Council, World Bank and IFC, and teaches writing and lives in Wakefield, RI. **Terry Dougherty** was an Afghanistan Peace Corps volunteer who has worked for 35 years in information technology with IBM and at Taylor U. and Indiana-Purdue. He hosts Afghan exchange students and coordinated Afghan YES students in Fort Wayne, IN. He is also vice president of operations for Friends of Afghanistan and a board member of the Indiana Center for Middle East Peace.

The Board also includes **Zolaykha Sherzat**, an Afghan-American who grew up and attended university in Switzerland, and now lives in NY. Zolay founded the NGO *School of Hope* and *Zarif Design*, and spends 3 months a year in Kabul. **Wazhma Sadat** is from Afghanistan and an honors sophomore at Yale majoring in global affairs. She founded *Kamyak Afghanistan*, a consulting and marketing firm that empowers small/medium Afghan enterprises, and is raising funds to build a primary school in Kabul. **Jennifer Achilles** is a pediatrician for a major hospital group in Seattle, WA, who also works with NGOs in Africa, focusing on infectious diseases and children born to HIV-AIDS.

#### Advisory Board

SOLA is supported in the implementation of its mission by an advisory board comprised of individuals who share the belief that talented young Afghan girls are the hope for an educated, progressive and prosperous Afghanistan.

**Dana H. Freyer**, Esq., co-founded and chairs the Global Partnership for Afghanistan, which works with rural Afghans to create farm businesses that alleviate poverty, build sustainable livelihoods and promote economic development. She is a retired senior partner of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in New York, where she practiced for 32 years and headed the firm's Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution and Corporate Compliance Program practices.

The Honorable **Ronald E. Neumann** is a career foreign service officer who was U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007, ambassador to Bahrain and Algeria, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. Amb. Neumann currently serves as the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, as well as a part-time professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University.

Dr. **Eric Widmer**, American scholar and educator, attended Deerfield, Williams, and Harvard. He spent 25 years at Brown University as professor, historian, student-life dean, and dean of admission and financial aid. Dr. Widmer became headmaster of Deerfield Academy in 1994 and founding headmaster at King's Academy in Jordan in 2007. In 2010 he was named Global Educator of the Year by the National Association of Independent Schools.

#### **Legal Status**

SOLA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as "School of Hope, Inc." in Florida, id: 04-3646166. ("SOLA" name to be resumed.)

Legal Counsel: Tanya McConnell & Manley Thaler  
Thaler & Thaler, LLP, W. Palm Beach, FL, USA

Accountant: Steve Shore, CPA  
East Providence, RI, USA



**Meena Z** became chief accountant and assistant finance officer at a new hospital in Kabul. She now attends Russell Sage University in NY.



**Wasima**—with three of six sisters medical doctors—will pursue her own medical career at Russell Sage in NY in 2012.

***Solutions to Afghanistan's often seemingly intractable problems will come from educated Afghans, especially Afghan women, and cannot be imposed from the outside.***



2012-06-21

## Financial Overview & Major Contracts

Primarily privately funded and run entirely by volunteers at its inception in October 2008, SOLA is gradually evolving into a financially sustainable and professionally managed NGO. No management compensation was paid until July 2011, at which point Global Nomads Group (GNG) provided a modest annual sum to the Head of School and Managing Director for administering the Youth LINKS program partnership.

### Previous Budgets—Jan 2009 to June 2012

2009 — \$80,000 (\$50k Achilles / \$30k Friends of Afghanistan and individual donors)  
 2010 — \$108,000 (\$50k Achilles / \$48k AMZ Renaissance Fdn. / \$10k individual donors)  
 2011 — \$154,000 (\$78k Achilles & AMZ / \$66k GNG, NY / \$10k individual donors)  
 Jan-Jun 2012 — \$77,000 (half of 2011)

(Management salaries in 2011–12: head of school, \$36k, and managing director, \$6.3k.)

The SOLA/GNG contract dated 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012 to the value of \$132k serves as the basis for virtual exchange programs between 240 American and Afghan youth, fostering cultural exchange, media literacy and civic engagement. Renewal is subject to the successful conclusion of a currently pending funding application.

## Proposed Four-Year Budget

Recognizing the huge potential for positive impact by its scholars on the future of Afghanistan, coupled with the need to put its operations on a more sustainable level, SOLA has commenced a major fundraising initiative. Successful attainment of current fundraising goals will allow SOLA to extend its operations with an enlarged team of professional staff able to dedicate their resources and abilities to SOLA on a full-time basis, and to serve a larger base of worthy SOLA scholars. SOLA intends to substantially increase this scholar base whilst maintaining its commitment to quality and a selective people-to-people approach.

Year	1	2	3	4	Total per line item	
	9/12–8/13	9/13–8/14	9/14–8/15	9/15–8/16		
Scholarships	\$ 453,000	\$ 641,000	\$ 982,000	\$1,609,000	\$3,685,000	45.6%
Kabul — Salaries & wages	\$ 373,212	\$ 390,252	\$ 422,892	\$ 457,932	\$1,644,288	20.3%
Kabul — School & office	\$ 195,800	\$ 246,400	\$ 289,800	\$ 284,800	\$1,016,800	12.6%
U.S. — Salaries & wages	\$ 299,275	\$ 273,775	\$ 263,275	\$ 254,27	\$1,090,600	13.5%
Other ( <i>travel, US office, services, etc.</i> )	\$ <u>184,890</u>	\$ <u>152,670</u>	\$ <u>154,250</u>	\$ <u>153,630</u>	\$ <u>645,440</u>	<u>8.0%</u>
<b>Total per year:</b>	\$1,506,177	\$1,704,097	\$2,112,217	\$2,759,637	<b>\$8,082,128</b>	100.0%

As evidenced by the proposed budget, SOLA operates very cost-effectively. Compensation for Kabul staff should be considered not as a human resource cost, but as further capacity-increasing for young Afghan leaders, true to our founder's motto —

*Solutions to Afghanistan's often seemingly intractable problems will come from educated Afghans, especially Afghan women, and cannot be imposed from the outside.*

## Contact

Shabana Basij-Rasikh, *Managing Director*  
 +93 (0) 702 646 320 — shabana@sola-afghanistan.org