

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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**NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER PARTNERS WITH
UNITED NATIONS TO PROVIDE
ELECTION EDUCATION TO AFGHAN VOTERS**
Focus on Forthcoming National Elections

Philadelphia, PA (August 13, 2009) – To help citizens in Afghanistan prepare for the country's national elections that begin August 20, 2009, the National Constitution Center, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, has developed education guides explaining the principles of the democratic electoral process. The materials, currently being distributed throughout Afghanistan, were created as part of the Center's ongoing International Engagement Program, launched in December 2008.

The election education guides, published in the Dari and Pashtu languages, are designed to help Afghan educators and community leaders explain the ins-and-outs of the voting process to newly literate, semi-literate, and illiterate adult audiences. Voters in Afghanistan will head to the polls August 20, 2009 to participate in the second national election since the fall of the Taliban. Examples of the election guides can be found at the UNDP Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) website: http://www.afghanelections.org/index.php?page=en_Civil+Education+Materials

"We are proud to be able to help the citizens of Afghanistan build a stable democracy for themselves by providing a deeper understanding of citizen engagement," said Linda E. Johnson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Constitution Center. "This type of project is precisely what the Center had in mind when it chose to enter the international arena."

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ADD ONE/INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

In addition to the development of the election guides, the Center has initiated other international projects focused on providing civic education, leadership, and support.

- *American Association of Museums / Museum Community Collaborations Abroad*
The Center, in partnership with the National Museum of Afghanistan, the Marafet High School in Afghanistan, and Constitution High School in Philadelphia will take the lead in creating an educational and cultural collaboration that will culminate in a photography exhibition titled “*We the People: Afghanistan, America and the Minority Imprint*,” demonstrating how student photographers in Afghanistan and the United States perceive issues such as individual rights. The project is designed to explore how minorities in different types of democracies perceive themselves as citizens, and how they define the concept of citizenship. By documenting their interpretations of civic themes through photography, the Center believes students in both the U.S. and Afghanistan might transcend the language and cultural barriers currently limiting the exchange of ideas between the two countries. The Center was granted \$105,000 in funding for this program from the American Association of Museums.
- *Afghanistan Independent Media Project*
The Center is working with Nasim Fekrat, leader of the Association of Afghan Blog Writers, to cultivate independent journalists in a developing democracy. In February, the Center brought Fekrat to the United States to serve as a Fellow and guest speaker at the 2009 *Peter Jennings Project for Journalism and the Constitution*, and to participate in a Duke University Media Fellowship. Fekrat is currently leading seminars on citizen journalism throughout Afghanistan as part of a tour organized by the Center and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.
- *Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University*
Working with Nancy Dupree, head of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University, the Center helped to develop a four-part book series on democracy. The ACKU produces and distributes books developed for newly literate individuals in Afghanistan with the objective of securing gains in literacy by providing practice materials.
- *International Delegation Visitation*
The Center continues to welcome and educate international visitors and delegations seeking knowledge about the United States Constitution. In 2009, the Center has hosted more than 30 delegations from across the globe and engaged in discussions about topics ranging from youth leadership and civic engagement to government transparency and elections. Guests have come from a wide variety of nations including Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Korea, Pakistan, and Swaziland.

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ADD TWO/INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

- *Marafet / Constitution High School Exchange*
In partnership with Constitution High School in Philadelphia and the Marafet School in Afghanistan, the Center is currently planning and developing several interactive projects designed to allow students from different corners of the earth to engage in topical conversations and deliberations. The projects include a real-time student conference called *The Exchange*, connecting students via Internet2, to discuss a constitutional topic agreed upon by the two schools; a joint student newspaper published by the American and Afghan schools; and lesson plans co-developed and shared by educators at both schools.

By building relationships with international partners, the Center intends to increase visitors' understanding of the enduring influence of the U.S. Constitution. "We encourage visitors to become active and engaged citizens, and it is our institutional mission to model those same values abroad," Johnson said.

The National Constitution Center, located at 525 Arch St. on Philadelphia's Independence Mall, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the ideas and values it represents. The Center serves as a museum, an education center, and a forum for debate on constitutional issues. The museum dramatically tells the story of the Constitution from Revolutionary times to the present through more than 100 interactive, multimedia exhibits, film, photographs, text, sculpture and artifacts, and features a powerful, award-winning theatrical performance, "Freedom Rising". The Center also houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, which serves as the hub for national constitutional education. Also, as a nonpartisan forum for constitutional discourse, the Center presents – without endorsement – programs that contain diverse viewpoints on a broad range of issues. For more information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.

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