

Conference on Strategic Planning of Higher Education for Afghanistan

**October 6th-7th, 2002
Indiana University Bloomington**

Conference Transcription

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Sunday, October 6, 2002**

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Nazif Shahrani, Indiana University

This conference will be a singular opportunity for Afghans to sit down and try to tackle the national problems of our own country: to come up with our own strategies and solutions to the critical situation regarding higher education, on our own terms and utilizing our own unique perspectives and experiences.

We must identify the main issues, as well as the strategies to tackle them. This is only the beginning of the process, which we must vigorously pursue until its conclusion.

Dean Patrick O'Meara, Indiana University

Indiana University is grateful for the presence of all the participants, and is hopeful of providing an environment conducive to far-reaching, intensive discussion.

This is a unique moment in Afghanistan's history. Reconstruction provides opportunities which can be lost if not seized. At the moment, practical and basic needs must be addressed, but it is important to realize that *how* these needs are addressed, implemented, and administered will begin to define a new political culture. Growing pains are inevitable, as in South Africa, but the basic intentions can still be realized. This is the moment of decision; even small decisions by you, "the authentic voices," will carry great weight.

Minister Sharif Favez

At the moment, we are defining plans and strategies, but there is a crucial need for Afghani intellectuals' involvement. We are faced with a lack of interest on the part of donor countries in building infrastructure; this area requires immediate attention. There have been suggestions to privatize some of our higher education, as well as to decentralize some institutions. However, an important approach, in the eyes of the president, is to avoid the "ethnic university"—a university that tends to only draw students from the immediate region.

Hekmat Karzai, Embassy of Afghanistan

This is an historic event, and the Embassy of Afghanistan is keenly aware of the significance of what is taking place here. The calamities of the last 23 years have caused great destruction with regards to educational opportunities. It is clear that our nation lacks an adequate system of higher education. The long-term success of every sector of our society depends on the educational resources available to our citizens.

Afghanistan has traditionally been a regional center for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. Even in the most ominous of times, when education was neither facilitated nor encouraged, Afghans have found ways to further their pursuit of this goal. We now have the responsibility and the freedom to develop a system of higher education.

Session I

Legacies of Soviet invasion, proxy wars and Taliban on the current state of higher education in Afghanistan

Minister Sharif Favez

There are four institutions of higher education in Kabul: Kabul University (KU), Kabul Medical Institute (KMI), University of Education (UE), Kabul Polytechnic (KP)

Demographics:

KU: 15% female students, 16% female teachers
KMI: 19% female students, 12% female teachers
UE: 47% female students, 27% female teachers
KP: 2.5% female students, 11% female teachers

Total: 20% female students; 17% female teachers

KU: 406 teachers
KMI: 168 teachers
UE: 114 teachers
KP: 114 teachers

Total: 802 teachers

KU: 6,286 students
KMI: 3,185 students
UE: 1,361 students
KP: 2,186 students

Total: 13,018 students

General Discussion. One major problem is that many Western universities would only like to establish links with KU. We have emphasized that there is a need for these universities to cooperate with our regional institutions as well, despite their excuses that there is no assurance of security in the provinces. We cannot afford to have so many academic links only with one institution; this in fact causes security problems, as in this situation, many families from provinces come to Kabul so their children can enroll at that university.

The University of Education is a young university. Fortunately, Japanese and US donors have shown a great deal of interest in this institution. UE was established when it was discovered that the Faculty of Education in Kabul was in a crisis situation, incapable of aiding in reconstruction of higher education on a national level. This institution should be particularly important in defining future goals and strategies of higher education in the country, and should be a joint venture of various governmental ministries.

It is necessary to establish a central university as an umbrella organization over all teacher training colleges. Two proposed names are the Afghan University of Education, and the Kabul University of Education

The minister would particularly like to be advised regarding the possibility of incorporating the KU School of Engineering into Kabul Polytechnic, and calling it the Kabul Institute of Engineering and Technology. The Russians have refused to cooperate in the reconstruction of KP (which would require around six or seven million dollars); however, a German NGO has offered to participate in this reconstruction.

The Kabul Medical Institute is an independent institute; it was formally part of the Health Ministry, but is now part of the Ministry of Higher Education. The fact that most of the teachers spend their time working in private clinics and hospitals has been identified as a major problem. This institute needs to reduce the number of both teachers and students in order to increase quality of education.

There are hopes to start distance learning projects between KMI and other universities.

In general, a way to compensate for the current lack of qualified educators should be the introduction of distance learning centers in Kabul. There are plans to establish four such centers at Kabul University, the Institute of Education, and Kabul Polytechnic.

[Video presentation by Dr. Zulfacar: Kabul University Revisted]

Atifa Rawan

April 2002 assessment of Kabul University library

Basic information. The University library was established at the same time as KU, in 1933. The new facility was once among the most modern in the country and fully equipped; it had a rich collection, particularly the Persian collections. Most materials were obtained in exchange programs. In 1985, the library consisted of 185,000 materials in collection, including books, journals, and microforms. A small budget was allocated for journal subscriptions. The library was open daily from 8-6; there was a trained staff of 20 as well as a professional librarian. The collection was quite accessible, with a useable card catalog.

In 2002, the situation is very much different. The 18 person staff is mostly untrained and unfamiliar with English language material. "Circulating" collection is really in closed stacks. Of the 1500 books from USAID, most were not at university level, and of little

use for research and teaching. Among the 2000 books from the Asia Foundation were many duplicated and outdated materials, including some textbooks in natural and social sciences. There is a “pathetic” collection of periodicals and journals. Their physical condition is in need of serious attention.

Recommendations:

User services/Access/Physical environment. The library is in the center of campus. Hours are currently from 8-4, which is not ideal for students. Library is not set up for any interlibrary loan, nor is there a reserve setup for professors. The library is in need of restoration; restroom facilities are inadequate. Heating, cooling, and lighting are in bad shape; there are no multimedia resources, or resources for copying/Xerox. At the time of this assessment, only 6,000 out of 23,000 materials were considered useful and worth keeping. (Science books were particularly out of date; books were not being physically well preserved.)

Some agencies around the world are trying to send books, but it is quite a difficult situation, because librarians need to have control over determining their collection based on needs of students and faculty, and the demands of the curriculum.

The card catalog is in bad shape, so the collection is even less accessible.

The reference books are mostly outdated. Only 2,000 were kept after cleaning, and even these are not in good shape. Reference material donations (encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs) are strongly encouraged.

Some books had been damaged: burnt, had bullet holes in them.

The poetry collection is nonexistent.

We need resources to process the current collection, as well as future donations.

Specific recommendations for future development.

1. A collection development policy is needed, including criteria for developing collections (i.e. donation/gift policy, discard policy, etc.). It must reflect the needs of students and faculty.
2. The library collection policy should be shared with faculty, not just among the library personnel. There should be a library board consisting of faculty from other departments collaborating with the library staff.
3. The needs training: general library organizational skills, some specific skills, English language training.
4. The collection should be open stack.

Note from Minister Fayez: Some of this information has changed over the last few months.

Session II

Discussion: Why do we need a higher education system at all? What should be its goals and objectives?

1. Is higher education a right or a privilege?

According to the Declaration of Human Rights, education is a right to every human being. In practical terms, it is privilege as well as a right: the right to have the chance to prove one's capacity, and an "earned privilege." Pragmatically, we must address how to realize this right within the context of Afghanistan's current situation.

As an "earned privilege," though, there needs to be a general change in attitude in the short-term. Students need to realize that education is still a privilege. There needs to be clear criteria for admission and participation in higher education.

The opportunity for higher education must be legally ensured for all.

2. Specific financial concerns.

In light of economic realities, if education is to be available for all, it will need to be free for some time to come. A critical issue is whether we can afford to educate so many people; costs will only increase in the future.

In addition, what will we do with our graduates? We need to look at the demand for the educated, and their opportunities for economic integration. The current population as well as future generations must be considered; their demands may differ.

For greater efficiency, bureaucracy, particularly in the Ministry of Higher Education, must be downsized and salaries must be increased.

Note that outside financing can probably be found, as long as we clearly identify what needs to be done, and how it can be accomplished. We need, right now, to identify the problems as well as a plan of action. Private foundations should be considered.

3. General concerns and comments

There is an immediate need to build and maintain infrastructure. Human capital is scarce; there are no qualified instructors. Material capital is also scarce. Additional immediate concerns include teacher education (particularly female teachers), teaching English, and textbook standardization.

In terms of the mission of the university, we have to remedy technical problems in the short term. For example, a school of Business should be strongly considered. Still, skill training needs to be combined with broader educational foundations, and the ability to think critically and solve problems, in order to address the needs of society in the long term.

An additional point of consideration: What is the relevance of Islamic values and instruction to such a comprehensive general education? Should it be separated from secular knowledge?

It seems the Ministry has gone as far as it can, given its resources. Now it needs some help that we can volunteer. The Afghan academic community has three main ways in which we can organize our contributions:

1. We can provide opinions on how the Ministry can organize priorities, which can be collated and submitted to the Ministry.
2. We can be advocates in this country and others (with permission and coordination of the Ministry) to come up with certain resources (human or financial) from the non-governmental sector.
3. This group of scholars should try to mobilize resources from our own Afghan community—to disseminate information about the current crisis, and to provide opportunities for others to contribute.

Would it be possible for exiles and/or KU graduates to organize into a foundation to intellectually, academically, and materially support the government, to take part in curriculum development?

In addition, perhaps each Afghan professor can come and teach for 2-3 months (in the summer). Safety is a chief concern, yet we are willing to volunteer.

Finally, serious consideration needs to be given to improving communication between Kabul and supporting foreign resources. The ministry needs an educational attaché here, and maybe in Europe, to coordinate educational efforts. Communication with Kabul is extremely difficult right now.

Minister Favez's responses:

Policies and plans. Our policy at first was to gain control over our 20 institutions, which were previously controlled by local governors and warlords. We successfully held campus elections on regional universities simply to control their administrations. We have followed a policy of centralization/reintegration/elimination (e.g. some institutions, including privately funded, profit-driven schools, in Kabul have been integrated into KU or eliminated)—despite substantial resistance. We have tried to keep regional colleges from establishing medical schools.

In the long term, we are planning to establish four major regional universities in Afghanistan. We have been able to obtain land from local governors for these purposes. In developing these universities, we should also consider the specific educational needs of each region. To establish the four universities, we need one hundred million dollars. Approached donors have included Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the US, and others.

In my meetings with donors, I suggested that a guesthouse for the MHE should be built at KU. Several meetings with German academics and donors led to a promise to build a 20-unit guesthouse for the MHE. A 12-unit guesthouse is being built by the MHE, with completion scheduled in two or three months. A Polish company will build 200 units to house teachers.

Teacher training. We have nine four-year teacher training colleges in the country. In some regions, there are also technical/vocational schools. We are planning to cooperate with the Ministry of Education to incorporate vocational education and teacher training into one institution, to downsize bureaucracy, efficiently utilize a limited budget, centralize institutions. We have asked the Asian Development Bank for consultation in establishing community colleges in provinces without regional universities. Georgetown University and the Association of American Community Colleges are cooperating in this endeavor.

Many teachers are unwilling and/or unable to travel abroad to continue training. Some short-term programs, both within and outside of Afghanistan (i.e. computer training in Germany), should be created or further developed and utilized. Significant financial aid is necessary to further these efforts, as salaries are very low.

The private sector. We have assigned a committee to consider the possibility of establishing the American University of Kabul, with the cooperation of the US Embassy. In addition, with the Afghan Turk Foundation, we are planning a joint venture to establish the Afghan Turk University. Provisions for involvement from the private sector are to be included in the constitution.

Would the Afghan community in exile be willing to fund a building in its name? We are also aware of the value of soliciting local participation in building local universities.

Planning for institutions in Kabul.

Kabul Polytechnic. Kabul Polytechnic was badly damaged; a German partner will aid in reconstruction. A Norwegian institution has agreed to start a water project. There will be linkage between Polytechnic and KU with Technical University of Berlin and Purdue University, via a distance learning center.

University of Education. Teachers in the fields of Special Education and English, as well as a Department of Testing and Measurement, are necessary; thus, the University of Education will assist in the design of a National English Program (at the high school level) for Afghanistan. The British will cooperate in this endeavor, but we need US support as well. The faculty of Kabul University alone does not have the capacity or budget to deal with the current crisis in the field of teacher training.

Kabul University. KU currently has links with more than twenty universities in the world, including institutions in Germany, Iran, India, Japan, Turkey, and the United States.

Curriculum development. Curriculum development must draw on the advice and expertise of academics, professionals, and the appropriate government officials.

Administration. Our administration attempts to dramatize Afghan national unity: our staff is selected on basis of qualifications, not ethnicity. We are actively training our staff in relevant skills. We are trying to reform the administration, and to downsize the bureaucracy. It is not easy.

Session III

Institutional strategies for achieving goals and meeting prioritized needs: Working Groups meetings

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Monday, October 7, 2002**

Session IV

Presentations of the Working Group reports and discussion

Group 2: Human resources development

- A. Faculty Recruitment, Training, and Enhancement
 - 1. A list of former Afghan staff in higher education should be prepared, and they should be contacted
 - 2. Foreign professors should be brought to teach in the universities, with young Afghan assistants assigned to them as translators
 - 3. “Double shifts”: hold morning and evening sessions
 - 4. Facilitate the use of AV teaching aids
 - 5. Consider the use of non-Afghan volunteers, including American Peace Corps volunteers
 - 6. Establish on-the-job training
 - 7. Pursue fellowships, scholarships, and short-term abroad programs

- B. Student Access, Admission Criteria, Enrollments, and Services
 - 1. Admission revival and establishment of standardized entrance exams. Admission criteria to include:
 - a. Secondary school evaluation
 - b. Capacity of school to accept new applications
 - c. Successful performance on entrance exam
 - 2. Provide free pre-college courses for under-privileged students
 - 3. Support for low-income students
 - 4. Entertainment programs for dorm students
 - 5. Tutoring services

- C. Research and Instructional Facilities
 - 1. Revive and strengthen the university research center
 - 2. Seek funds for research from foreign schools
 - 3. The research center should accommodate foreign scholars on subjects dealing with Afghanistan
 - 4. Integrate library resources and curriculum activities
 - 5. Re-establish and strengthen the laboratory facilities
 - 6. Establish audio-visual centers as teaching aid
 - 7. Establish computer centers
 - 8. Establish language laboratories

Groups 3 and 4: Academic programs in the social sciences, arts, and humanities; Academic programs in professional/technical/vocational schools and services

It is agreed that the educational system at the university level in Afghanistan is in need of a major overhaul and restructuring.

The areas we particularly considered:

- A. Curriculum Development
 - 1. Develop a balanced curriculum to include supporting essential social sciences along with technical areas
 - 2. Develop a curriculum with short- and long-term objectives
- B. Advisory Board
 - 1. Involve educators in Afghanistan to determine particular needs and curriculum
 - 2. Develop harmony between Afghan scholars inside and outside of the country
 - 3. Solicit help of advisors from universities in foreign countries in the development process of Afghan higher educational system
- C. Define the role and mission of Kabul University and the other major universities in the main provinces
- D. Encourage the English language for technical areas in order to benefit from printed/online resources
 - 1. Respective departments and colleges should have a significant role in determining foreign languages to be emphasized
 - 2. Promote teaching multi-lingual systems in high schools throughout the country
- E. Improve the efficiency of college training systems in order to improve attrition rates
- F. Encourage a balanced approach to the development of arts and sciences
 - 1. Technical areas have been generally favored by foreign donors
 - 2. Develop and encourage the fine arts in the Afghan education system

Groups 1 and 5: Higher education institutional structures, administrative reforms, finance and physical infrastructure; International community and the reconstruction of higher education system in Afghanistan

A. Financial

Create a not-for-profit corporation/foundation for Afghan Higher Education. We will need seed grants, a charter, determination of funding priorities, etc. Contact Afghan professionals, other groups, Americans with interest and/or involvement in Afghanistan. Create a board with Afghan-Americans and other Americans. Transparency and accountability in financial statements, allocations, etc. is absolutely necessary.

Specific tasks:

- Planning
- Seed money
- Develop draft charter
- Formation of a transitional board
- Endorsement of embassies
- Volunteer officers
- Setting up accounting

A request was made to the participants to each contribute \$100 to get started with basic costs.

B. Institutional Structure

Consider a three-tiered approach: community colleges; specialized institutions such as Polytechnic, KMI, etc.; KU and major regional universities for study of the liberal arts.

Within KU, consider developing a two-year general education program, with only the upper division specific to individual programs. Also, consider initiating a peer-review system to set and maintain accreditation standards.

Specific tasks:

- Look at successful American models of 3-tiered systems, such as California and New York
- Further consider accreditation issues

C. Administrative Reforms

1. Shared governance needs to be kept strong
2. Residence halls and dormitory life need to be looked at (athletics, extra-curricular activities)

3. Create benchmarks to identify required positions to simplify budget; some US models might be helpful
- D. Physical Infrastructure
1. Master Planning and Maintenance

Master planning should be used to maximize the benefits of KU, and to create an “academic oasis” on each campus. Some architectural and university groups may be interested in pro bono work.

Maintenance is a fairly new concept, but cost considerations render rebuilding as out of the question. Consider developing a two-year degree on maintenance.

Comments and discussion regarding the working groups’ presentations

Curriculum and human resources.

Move to a semester and credit system, versus a year system

Develop a two-year general education program that exposes students to a multitude of disciplines. We need to have some general education as a foundation for social discourse.

We also need to take into account how the high schools are preparing students for college.

Community colleges can serve to prepare students for the university, but cannot fully take the place of the university as an institute offering a broad-based general education that helps to develop critical thinking skills.

Only efficient curriculum can lead to efficient use of buildings and facilities.

The area of Social Sciences has been largely ignored by foreign donors and supporters. We should emphasize this portion of our curriculum.

What to do regarding education within the area of Islamic Culture?

Kabul University should move towards being a research institution, not a provider of technical training or teacher training (which should be covered, with some possible overlap, by the UE)

We need to ensure that students have access to 6-12 months of practical work in their chosen area (i.e. an internship or practicum).

There is a need for experienced professors of English languages and literatures, not just English-speaking volunteers. There is also a need for instruction of technical English, for schools such as medicine, engineering, and agriculture. Along with that, there is a need for a national English program at the high school level. A program for such English

language instruction should be developed at the University of Education. We particularly need American support in this area.

There is consensus that English should primarily be taught as a research language, not as a language in which to conduct classes.

In general, we need to address the problem of general literacy, and get women involved in community service.

Currently, there are 650 NGOs in Kabul: they pay better than positions in higher education, and thus attract returning young Afghans.

Institutional, structural, and bureaucratic concerns.

Consider the American and Japanese models of multi-campus universities: they have many benefits, and few drawbacks. Two models include *segmental*, with each campus having a specialization, and *regional*, with a central campus as well as the regional campuses offering broad-based educational opportunities. Administration may prove quite difficult, but academically it is possible (particularly with the assistance of distance learning technologies).

We need to remember that we must discuss all institutes of higher education in Afghanistan, not just Kabul University.

We should try to standardize our vocabulary regarding institutions of higher education, particularly if we will be conducting our efforts on an international level.

Community colleges must be established swiftly, as they are likely to be able to respond more quickly to the urgent needs of the Afghan nation.

The individual institutions should be granted some degree of autonomy, to prevent micromanagement by governmental bureaucracy. However, the first stage in reconstruction is to standardize and centralize these institutions. Only then, when we are sure they have the facilities and resources to take care of themselves, can decentralization start to happen.

Before we resolve on any models for Afghanistan, we need to consider the best (and worst) practice examples from around the world—then take into account the realities on the ground in Afghanistan.

Involvement on the part of those in the US.

Get foreign professors to come as volunteers for a year.

We can tailor our individual involvement and support to our interests and experiences.

“The hope of the Afghan diaspora”: Is this the right time to create a voluntary association of university professors? With e-mail and fax, we can communicate effectively and make a concerted, institutionalized effort.

Influential non-Afghans should be involved in the foundation, since we are in fact basing our ideas on universal values.

Summary of proposals of what we can do here:

1. Proposal to develop an association of Afghan scholars. This should be sufficiently well-organized, with a scholarly focus, to facilitate research, annual conferences, and so forth. Once membership reaches sufficient levels, they can organize themselves to find practical ways to advise faculties in Afghanistan based on their expertise. Such an organization can serve as an invaluable resource for the Ministry of Higher Education.
2. Proposal to develop a Foundation, with the primary goals of:
 - a. Assisting in raising funds for specific programs.
 - b. Establishing a series of merit-based scholarships for exceptional students in the universities
 - c. Commissioning reports
 - d. Financing the expenses of those who travel to Afghanistan for specific purposes
 - e. Note that Afghans can talk to their accountants regarding inheritance law and donating to the Foundation (irrevocable charitable trust)
3. Establish a connection between the Ministry of Higher Education and these groups—a liaison to keep communications current. (Note: this has apparently already been discussed at the Embassy.)

Session V

Matching ends and means, or outlining a framework for a strategic plan of higher education for Afghanistan

I. Volunteers are sought for the following tasks:

A. Financial Structure:

1. Planning for the foundation
2. Drafting the charter of the organization
3. Identifying/soliciting seed money to organize, draft chart, incorporate
4. Identifying a set of transitional board members—no subsequent requirement to be permanent member
5. Securing endorsements from MHE and Embassy
6. Serving as volunteer officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer)
7. Filing as non-profit organization, securing tax exempt ID
8. Establishing bank account
9. Developing short- and long-term funding priorities
10. CASE standards: identify national standards for transparency, accountability
11. Developing a marketing/PR plan for soliciting donations

B. Institutional Structure

1. Developing a coordinating board
2. Identifying useful models (e.g. California, NY, Texas, Wisconsin)
3. Articulations of connections between various tiered institutions
4. Accreditation issues for specific professional programs

Note: Business as an additional academic/professional discipline needs to be supported in the institutions of higher education

C. Administrative Reforms

1. Shared governance
2. Student Life
3. Reform regarding budget issues
4. Benchmarks, searching standards, best practices (Association of College Presidents, Association of Governing Boards, etc.)

D. Physical Infrastructure

1. Academic planning and enrollment management
2. Physical master planning
3. Maintenance management
4. Seeking models such as Association of Facilities Officers, Society of College and University Planners, etc.

II. The creation of an association of Afghan scholars, and a foundation

Proposed names.

“International Association for the Advancement of Higher Education in Afghanistan”

“Foundation for Supporting Higher Education in Afghanistan”

Consensus.

We should support creation of an association of Afghan scholars, as well as a foundation with the specific task of raising funds to help the Ministry of Higher Education in fulfilling its goals. We then must create clear charters and by-laws defining the goals of these groups. Once the charter is established, we can begin seeking additional support, including from the Afghan government, Embassy, and the Ministry of Higher Education.

Some sort of liaison between the foundation and association will be crucial: we can use our connections for financial resources, as well as use our expertise for academic/structural improvements. A liaison with the Ministry of Higher Education can be determined once the foundation is established (via the Embassy or Dr. Zulfacar).

The association and foundation are different, but should be linked. On the merits of efficiency, fundraising and scholarship can and should be integrated. However, in the initial stages, we should consider establishing these entities separately, with the understanding that eventually they need to be linked, especially to ensure that the suggestions of the academic group are carried out. The foundation’s fundraising activities must be explicitly linked with the specific tasks identified by the association (as identified earlier in our action plans).

Nominations for committees to form the association and foundation.

Association: Shahrani (chairman), Ahmadi, Baha, Nadiri

Foundation: Qayoumi (chairman), Ahmadzai, Payind, Rawan, Razi, Samizai

Timeframe.

Following the conference, the next step is to begin drafting the appropriate charter documents for the association and the foundation, with the hope of convening committees by early December or January. (Possibly at Ohio State?)

Future considerations.

To improve communication:

1. Establish a LISTSERV
2. Obtain clear contact information for Minister Fayez, as well as other participants
3. Either create a web page for Afghan higher education as a ways of facilitating international participation, or further develop an existing page created by Dr. Zulfacar (afghanhighered.org)

Coordinate future visits or meetings on the basis of semester terms

Investigate the possibility of setting up an advisory board for MHE composed of presidents of US/European universities

Draft a Title VI proposal for the next meeting

Possibly hold a conference in Kabul

Session VI

Next Steps

Minister Sharif Fayez

Establish a permanent liaison between US scholars and the Ministry. You need to open an office at the MHE in Kabul; the representative does not necessarily need to be from the US. Note that there may in fact be a committee of Afghan professors already serving this function in Kabul.

Create the association and foundation here in the US, representing Afghan academics. When we develop our curriculum, we will need general guidelines, and your contributions will be appreciated.

Session VII

Summary presentation of the conference proceedings

[Not taped; transcription is taken from handwritten notes taken at the conference]

The Minister articulated our needs clearly. Our prioritized needs are as follows. We must repair the damaged infrastructure, a result of the legacies of the Soviet system (particularly the institutes), the wars, and the NGOs. We must address our “brain drain,” especially of people with advanced degrees. Research and instructional materials are missing, destroyed, or outdated; the situation must be rectified. The curriculum shift to a religious focus in the Taliban era ignored providing basic readiness to study at college level. We must have students who are prepared to study at institutions of higher education.

There is a clear vision for the future:

- Create four regional comprehensive universities, as well as specialize some colleges in Kabul. The “teknicom” Russian institutions might shift to junior college vocational/technical schools.
- Private-sponsored education must be discussed in light of the constitution
- Residential areas should integrate students from all over the country, to avoid “ethnic universities”

The group looked at several issues to facilitate the achievement of these goals: *Financial*. First, we should establish a separate foundation, chartered under US law as tax-exempt, which is able to accept and award donations with transparent accounting practices. Participation should include non-Afghans and other friends of higher education in Afghanistan, as well as Afghan scholars. Second, we must set the foundation's funding priorities: an endowment for mission enhancement, as well as one-time funding opportunities.

The group desires to emphasize the necessity of transparency, accountability and best practice models such as the CASE model.

Institutional structure. We should re-structure institutions of higher education into a three-tier system, but with a shared coordinating board. A two-year general education program will contribute greatly towards the development of skills in literacy, critical thinking, basic science, and mathematics.

Accreditation. Between the 5 universities and 9 professional schools, ensure that standards are maintained across the system. Initiate peer review to conform to international standards.

Administrative reform. We must provide for an administration of shared governance, but also streamline the bureaucracy by re-engineering the organization. Budgeting is currently carried out on a "line-item" level; this should be reconsidered. We must seriously consider how to address the needs of a greater volume of non-traditional students, such as the handicapped. We must seek out benchmarks for best practices by studying other systems' approaches.

Physical Infrastructure. We must make a five- to ten-year plan for enrollment expectations in order to control quality. Our resultant academic plan then drives a physical master plan. Spaces should be integrated to allow for efficient uses of limited resources. We must also be aware of environmental economics, such as the impact on city, and the creation of an atmosphere of an "academic oasis."

We must introduce the concept of maintenance, as Afghanistan cannot afford to completely rebuild. Therefore, we must not only plan for new building, but also for how to maintain it—in terms of both materials and manpower resources. This has potential as a two-year degree, which could then be a job supply/creation force.

Human Resources. Concentrate on faculty recruitment; Afghan exiles may be contacted for temporary work. In addition, update BA/BS knowledge of present faculty. We need to meet the basic needs of faculty, like salaries, in order to keep them in the universities. They must also be provided with access to basic research tools, including some computer driven like Lexus-Nexus.

Curriculum. Move to a credit and semester system for the sake of efficiency. The general education content needs in-depth examination. Solicit the contributions of industries in developing curriculum as well as funding additional research, which will in turn

revitalize both industry and education.

We must provide instruction in English as a viable research language. Some faculties, especially engineering, agriculture, etc., may one day shift to using English as their primary language of instruction.

The following organizations will be created.

- “International Association for the Advancement of Higher Education in Afghanistan”
- “Foundation for Supporting Higher Education in Afghanistan”
- A board of advisors for the Minister of Higher Education, including accomplished scholars, professionals, and prominent university administrators.

Formation of these organizations, as well as a clearly defined liaison with the Ministry of Higher Education, is our key priority. Following this, we must improve the ability of teachers in Afghanistan to do their job by providing training, and updated their methods and materials. We must also devote serious attention to updating the curriculum of higher education (particularly the two-year general education program).

Responses to these proposals

Conference participants encouraged USAID to support 1) teacher training and 2) agricultural studies in universities in Afghanistan, though the response was that USAID has mainly been involved in primary education. English as a Second Languages programs should also be a priority. USAID suggested contacting the Asian Development Bank as well.

Session VIII

Conclusions: Towards a framework for a strategic plan of higher education in Afghanistan

How to proceed with the organization of the Association, Foundation, and Advisory Council?

The first step in the formation of all of these organizations should be a clear presentation of their purposes and goals in the form of a charter.

Next, we must create a data bank of Afghan scholars who should be contacted about participation in these organizations. Each participant may suggest 10 or more people who should be invited to participate. Eminent non-Afghan scholars should also be encouraged to participate.

Association. We need to do some homework regarding other professional academic associations’ structures. Possibilities regarding membership practices include the development of a data bank, which will be a source of information regarding who’s who,

where they are, what they do, and so forth. We need to obtain seed-money; once this is obtained, then we can identify our initial set of activities. Note that this association should also have a home base in Afghanistan.

The tasks of the committee assigned to the preliminary planning of the association are:

- Look up professional association charters
- Create a data bank of scholars
- Compose a preliminary charter
- Explore possibilities for seed-money and identify priorities to produce results on the ground in Afghanistan
- Establish membership fees and dues, including the \$100 initial donation
- Consider communication and publishing ventures
- Clarify the mechanism for liaison between the organization and the MHE (a means of staying in constant contact to deal with urgent needs, concerns in the regional campuses, etc.)

Foundation. First, we must obtain tax-exempt status. After that, we should approach appropriate organizations to seek funding, including the Carnegie, Mellon, Ford, and MacArthur Foundations. We may also ask them for insights and contact points for additional small family foundations that may be sympathetic to our cause. Once the foundation grows to an international level, we may also approach the Marshall Foundation. Afghan businessmen should likewise be contacted. We can also get some ideas from development offices whose universities are already linked to Afghanistan. There needs to be absolute accountability and transparency in all transactions.

The tasks of the committee assigned to the preliminary planning of the foundation are:

- As for the Association, we need to study similar organizations for charter information and organization
- Compose a preliminary charter
- Investigate obtaining tax-exempt status

Advisory Board. Once a charter is written, identify some high-profile individuals (e.g. eminent scholars, well-known university presidents, and experts in higher education development) to be contacted for membership.

Note: a specific committee has not been designated to begin with these preliminary efforts. Any work will most likely require close cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education.

- Develop mission statement with the help of the Minister of Higher Education
- Consider membership invitations based on mission statement

A final note: owing to our professional background, we have the tendency to apply American academic standards in our plans for Afghanistan, but the Germans, Japanese, and French are the ones who are actually currently involved in civilian work in Afghanistan. America is busy fighting the war; they are not concentrating on the process of rebuilding in their policy focus, though admittedly they are participating on some level. The US administration, as well as the national and international media, needs to be made aware of this discrepancy. An attitude shift is imperative if we are to find widespread support for the furtherance of this worthy cause.