

## **Sakeena Yacoobi: History and Background**

Sakeena Yacoobi came to the United States in the 1970s and earned her B.A. in Biological Sciences from University of the Pacific in 1977. In March, 2006, she received the Citizen Leader Award from the Jacoby Center for Community and Regional Studies in the College of the Pacific, and spent a week on campus teaching and working with groups of students. The Citizen Leader on Campus program brings distinguished alumni back to campus to interact with students and faculty.

### **Professional Career:**

- Sakeena Yacoobi, Class of '77, is Executive Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), a non-governmental organization providing education and teacher training to women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 1995, Yacoobi founded this initially underground organization in Peshiwar, Pakistan during Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Under her leadership, AIL has grown to serve over 350,000 women and children each year, helping women gain skills and achieve economic independence. With a staff of 480, mostly Afghan women, AIL operates 18 learning centers and 4 health clinics in the two countries. Yacoobi is also co-founder and Vice-President of Creating Hope International, a Michigan-based non-profit organization that provides education and health assistance to people around the globe in areas of greatest need.
- Yacoobi is a member of the Board of Directors of the Global Fund for Women; advisor to the Women's Learning Partnership, and member of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief. She has been a speaker on women's rights, education, and healthcare at numerous international conferences, including the California Governors Conference on Women and Families and the International Institute for Peace Education in South Korea, Turkey, and Greece.
- She was a delegate to the United Nations Millennium Forum for non-governmental organizations in New York in 2000, the Roundtable on Women's Leadership in Rebuilding Afghanistan sponsored by UNIFEM and the Belgian government in Brussels in 2001, and the UN Population Fund Conference on Gender Violence in Slovakia in 2002.
- Born in Herat, Afghanistan, Yacoobi came to the United States in the 1970s, completed the B.A. in Biological Sciences at Pacific in 1977, and a Master's degree in Public Health from Loma Linda University in 1981.
- In the 1980s Yacoobi worked as a health consultant in California and Michigan, and taught at D'Etire University in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. From 1992-95, she worked for the International Rescue Committee in Pakistan, coordinating the education program for girls, increasing the number of refugee girls enrolled in IRC schools from 3,000 to 15,000 in one year.
- Yacoobi sees her educational and mentoring experiences at Pacific as helping her gain the leadership skills to develop programs that have made a difference to thousands of people in her native country. The first in her family to receive a

college degree, she sees education as a means to escape poverty and provide opportunities for women and families. Despite the devastation produced by years of war and conflict, Yacoobi envisions a day when there will be “no child uneducated and health care for all.”

### **Honors and Awards**

- Sakena Yacoobi and AIL have received numerous awards for their leadership in affecting the lives of women and children in war-torn Afghanistan and Pakistan. Yacoobi and AIL jointly received the 2005 Democracy Award of the National Endowment for Democracy and the 2004 Women’s Rights Prize from the Peter Gruber Foundation.
- She received the 2003 Peacemakers in Action Award from the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, the Recognition of Service Award from two local governmental bodies in Afghanistan, and the Bill Graham Award from The Rex Foundation.
- She was one of 1000 women nominated jointly to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. In 2006, she received \$480,000 over three years from the Skoll Foundation to support her work.

### **Relation to the University’s Mission and Goals**

- As signified by the award she received in March 2006, Sakena Yacoobi exemplifies the citizen leader ideal that is the mark of a Pacific graduate. Uncommon as it was in the 1970s for an Afghan woman to leave her family and country, her journey to the United States to further her education was sufficient to distinguish Yacoobi as a leader. Her education was not an end goal, however, but preparation for a career requiring courageous vision and leadership in implementing quality education and vocational training, literacy, human rights training, and safe healthcare for women and children in Afghanistan. Through her significant impact on thousands of people in need, her numerous speaking engagements, her leadership of non-profit organizations, and her international awards and recognitions, Sakena Yacoobi brings great distinction to the University of the Pacific.