

**Nina Papadopoulos, IRC, Address to the American Federation of Teachers Conference, July 16, 2002, Las Vegas, Nevada**

It is both a pleasure and honor to be with you here today.

I have been working with the International Rescue Committee on education in for Afghans for the past two and a half years. IRC has a long-standing reputation supporting quality education programs for Afghans dating back to the 1980's. Beginning in 1985 IRC began work with Afghan refugees supporting programs to strengthen services in secondary education, English language training, curriculum and material development for secondary students and teachers, teacher training programs as well as training in computer literacy. Currently IRC supports a large refugee education program in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and a community based education program in central and eastern Afghanistan. Our fundamental goal during the time of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan was to train a cadre of female professionals in the education sector who would eventually contribute for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We are happy that this time has come sooner than we thought.

The last seven months has been a fascinating time, as opportunities have opened up for girls and women – we continue to be challenged with keeping education high on the agenda for policy makers both inside and outside of Afghanistan as well as getting international aid to fund medium to long term efforts in the education sector.

As Wahida mentioned, parents are eager now more than even to send their children to school. They see education as a vehicle out of a predominant culture of revenge - we are challenged with the task of helping them to realize their dreams by working with them to create quality education programming in line with the national agenda for education.

Earlier this year, AFT's International Affairs Director David Dorn came to visit us to explore opportunities for future collaboration. We are thrilled about this and are looking into possibilities to work together to improve approaches to teacher training and capacity building within the education sector. I was very impressed with the technical expertise and depth of experience within AFT's membership. The IRC looks forward to learning from this experience and improving our approaches in Afghanistan together.

Thank you again for having us here.