

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT *Focus on Supporting Democracy in Afghanistan*

Philadelphia, PA (December 10, 2008) - Today, on World Human Rights Day, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the National Constitution Center announces that it has launched an International Engagement Program, dedicated to promoting constitutional principals to emerging democracies through the educational and civic learning programs it has developed in the U.S. These initiatives are being implemented both domestically and abroad, with a particular focus on the development of democracy in Afghanistan.

“In drafting the Constitution, the framers looked both at home and abroad to find wisdom, and, in turn, the American experience has inspired and informed other countries,” said National Constitution Center President and CEO Joseph M. Torsella. “The International Engagement Program provides a unique opportunity for the Center to take its programming beyond our walls and beyond our shores to help promote liberty and constitutionalism. We are extremely proud of this project and look forward to seeing it develop.”

The Center will keep its primary focus on increasing understanding and awareness of the U.S. Constitution for U.S. citizens. However, the International Engagement Project will build on the strong interest shown in the Center by international visitors and leaders since opening in 2003. In the last year, for example, the Center has hosted over 300 international leaders via the Department of State, the International Visitors Center, and other international contacts. Notable visitors have included:

- John Howard, former Prime Minister of Australia
- Jurists and prosecutors from Kurdistan

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- Zuhair Mohsin Mohammed Abdulazeez, Mayor of Mosul, Iraq
- Delegations from nations ranging from Brazil and Argentina to Belarus, Serbia, Bosnia, Egypt, and Kazakhstan

In addition, the Center hosted a weeklong symposium in October with Menachem Ben-Sasson, Chairman of the Constitution, Law & Justice Committee in Israel, who sought out the Center and affiliated scholars in connection with his work to draft a written Constitution for the State of Israel.

The Center is also integrating international components into existing programming. This year, international fellows will participate in the Peter Jennings Project for Journalists and the Constitution, and will take part in a special presentation on executive power and politics in Afghanistan. A series of evening programs about current international topics is also being discussed.

“By utilizing the relationships being established with partners overseas, the Center will be able to increase visitors’ value, appreciation for, and understanding of our own Constitution, by exploring in real-time the struggles, conflicts, value choices, and consequences that accompany the transition to constitutional government elsewhere,” said Larry Kent, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Center’s Board of Trustees.

Overseas, the Center has initiated a series of projects focused on Afghanistan through public and private partnerships with the Ministry of Education, the Marefet School, and other civil society organizations. In October, Center President and CEO Joseph M. Torsella visited Afghanistan to discuss ways in which the Center could be of assistance to the emerging democracy. As a result, the Center will:

- Assist with the development of an election education brochure focused on the 2009 fall elections in Afghanistan to be distributed to primary and secondary schools across the country, describing the significance of national elections in Afghanistan.

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- Facilitate a teacher training partnership between a teacher training institute in Kabul and an American university.
- Aid in developing primary and secondary school curriculum that meets regional and international standards, with a focus on civic education and constitutional rights.
- Provide supplemental educational materials about democracy for use in the classroom, through a partnership with the Marefet School.
- Make the Exchange program available to the Marefet School via live video conference, and include classroom curriculum determined mutually by Constitution High School in Philadelphia and the Marefet School. Through a civic learning partnership, teachers at both schools will have the opportunity to exchange lesson plans, share web resources, collaborate on joint service projects, and receive photographs and written contributions for school newspapers from students.
- Help produce a four-part book series on democracy and the role of active citizens in conjunction with the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU). ACKU produces and distributes books to newly literate individuals in Afghanistan with the goal of boosting their confidence as they achieve literacy. The Center will help with the thematic development of this new series and will provide engaging, informative, and effective content.

“We've decided to make a particular commitment to the new democracy in Afghanistan. My experience there solidified my impression that Afghanistan is an especially needful place for our first overseas initiative; the people I met were testament to the fact that it's also a uniquely hopeful one. With 46% of the population 14 years or younger and an audience eager for opportunity, the civic education we provide now can resonate for generations,” said Torsella. “This represents a thoughtful expansion of the Center's

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programs, but it also represents the Center's civic commitment to one of the most important causes of our time and one of the greatest challenges our country currently faces. As we urge visitors to become active citizens, the Center wants to model those same values on an institutional level. And one way we can do that, as we mark our five year anniversary as a successful institution, is to join with many others in supporting the highest and best aspirations of the Afghan people for a secure and free society. “

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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