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By WeNews Staff



Rina Amiri

21 LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

(WOMENSENEWS)--

Rina Amiri, Afghan Liberator

Since returning to her native Afghanistan in 2002, Rina Amiri has played an active role in the peace process and in strengthening the framework for women's participation in the political process. In the last five years, Rina has played a variety of roles in the peace process, beginning with serving as an advisor in the United Nations Education, Cultural and Scientific Organization where she worked with women's organizations and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Soon after, she was recruited to serve as a political affairs officer in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. She served in this capacity for four and half years.

Currently she serves as the lead consultant at the Open Society Institute, where she works with civil society organizations and women's groups, and other stakeholders, to strengthen and advance the reform efforts put in place during the last five years.

Amiri has largely sought to work toward putting the framework in place to allow Afghans within the country to determine the course for the future of Afghanistan and to enable Afghan women and men to speak on their own behalf.

As a UNESCO advisor, Amiri in March 2002 helped female journalists develop their own professional media outlet, Voices of Afghan Women in Global Media. This group of women eventually went on to develop radio programs within and outside of Kabul as well as produce television programs and women's magazines. The programs played a significant role in generating awareness about women's political rights during the election processes.

On election day in October 2004, as she waited to vote, she was "pressed

among a throng of women from a myriad of backgrounds--in modern attire, in burkas--all participating for the first time in their life in the political processes of their country," Amiri says.

In 1973, when she was 4 years old, Amiri and her family fled Afghanistan during the overthrow of the king. Her family spent two and a half years in India before settling in San Francisco in the Afghan Diaspora community.

She also served as a senior research associate at the Women and Public Policy Program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, where she joined the Women Waging Peace colloquium. The Harvard-based program brought together peace activists from around the world.

There, Amiri met hundreds of women, many of whom, after enduring great personal ordeals and loss, "channeled their grief and sense of outrage into action and became agents of change." She adds that when she returned to Afghanistan and became involved in peace-building efforts, in many ways, these women served as mentors.

--*Irene Lew*