



# Rebuilding hope in Afghanistan

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They had dreams of a better life for their children. More than two decades of war had ravaged their families and communities and left their educational system in ruins. Two generations of opportunity lost. Yet the people of Afghanistan never lost hope. Their own dreams thwarted, they never stopped believing that their children's would one day be ignited.

Nothing could discourage their resolve. As educational opportunities for Afghan girls were destroyed, the Afghan people responded. Entire communities – both men and women – supported informal schools. Many clandestine schools also provided skills training and secular education for children. Teachers risked their lives to hold classes in homes across the country. This indomitable spirit and hunger for education is shaping Afghanistan's future, and provides, perhaps, the strongest hope that its citizens can surmount the many challenges they still face.

Today, education is emerging in Afghanistan as a powerful tool for rebuilding the country. Since the end of 2001, the Afghan government has been working with local communities, non-governmental organizations and the international community. Together, they have repaired hundreds of school buildings, provided safe water and sanitation facilities to more than 1,000 others, supplied more than 8,500 tents to house

temporary classrooms and airlifted thousands of tons of school supplies into the country. They have developed curricula and helped ensure that girls have access to education.

In March 2002, schools opened their doors for the first time in years. Three million children – one third of them girls – flooded the classrooms. With international support, the Ministry of Education is now focusing its efforts on improving the school environment so that even more girls will come to school.

## Rebuilding a country

This year, there are more than 4 million children, 1.2 million of them girls, attending 7,000 schools across the country. About 80 per cent of all pupils are in the first four grades, representing a new generation of children with dreams of becoming teachers, doctors, engineers and future leaders. The education sector is functioning in all 32 provinces and 360 districts. It is estimated that there are more Afghan children in school today than at any time in the country's history.

Education is the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women and promoting human rights and democracy. The people of Afghanistan recognize its value. And they have demonstrated that education can be delivered under catastrophic circumstances and does not have to wait for infrastructure to be in place. With courage and resilience, they have shown that education can be the bridge that transforms an emergency situation into one of hope and promise.

Education has unified much of the country: Everyone agrees that educating children is good for society. As a result, nearly all military and ethnic factions are working together to get children back to school. Religious leaders from across the nation are throwing their weight behind the need for education for every boy and girl.

Education is helping children and families establish a basic routine in their daily lives. It is providing a sense of normality, confidence and security, which is important for healing and recovery after decades of conflict and severe hardship.

At school, children have opportunities for self-expression and the chance to engage with their peers. As children learn, they gain confidence and skills that give them hope for a better future. By reaching children in all ethnic and social groups, education is laying the foundation for a society that is equitable and inclusive.

Education is providing vital income to communities; through school reconstruction programmes, the staffing of logistics centres, and the production of school materials and equipment.

Education is offering girls, who have long been denied their right to learn, a chance to realize their potential, and is giving women the opportunity to reclaim their place in the education system as teachers, principals and advisors.

Finally, education is providing hope for peace and stability. The development of a national school system sends a message to the people of Afghanistan that their government is functioning and committed to investing in the future prosperity of the country.

## A crossroads

This is a defining moment in Afghan history. Children are hungry to learn and their parents are committed to improving their own lives and those of their children. The government is committed to education. And as never before, the international community has recognized that education is key to a nation's peaceful and prosperous future. The foundation has been laid and considerable momentum has been built to provide education for all children in Afghanistan.

All eyes were once on Afghanistan. Now, the global community has shifted its focus to other parts of the world.

We cannot lose sight of the work that still needs to be done. Teachers are reporting more children seeking to enrol every day. Many children are being taught in temporary classrooms. There is a need for more books, supplies and investment in teacher training and support. We must continue to move forward.

The people of Afghanistan are playing their part in the reconstruction of their country. They are using the support already provided by the international community and creating jobs and training, motivation and confidence – and a new future filled with possibility. They are building not just schools, but also their nation, and in doing so, they are crossing the bridge to development. They know that education is their best chance to shake off their legacy of civil strife, poverty and despair. They know it is their only chance to realize the hopes they have for their children. Those dreams must not be forgotten.

They cannot do it alone.



“In Afghanistan...I watched as 3,000 schools across that war-torn country reopened, and 3 million children, boys as well as girls, streamed in, many for the first time in six years. It was UNICEF’s largest logistical operation ever in support of education – and it succeeded because the interim government committed itself to a drive that mobilized teachers, registered children, readied school facilities and organized a curriculum and an entire educational structure virtually from scratch. It was a stirring affirmation of hope and defiance, and the universal spirit behind it has only reinforced my conviction that the future remains in our hands as never before.”

Carol Bellamy  
Executive Director  
United Nations Children’s Fund

More than two decades  
of armed conflict and  
brutality had ravaged  
Afghanistan.

# Legacy of war

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Many children lost parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. Landmines, bombs, shells and grenades littered the country, wounding and killing people every day. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan children became refugees within their own country, driven from their homes and villages, herded into cities where they lived in poverty and despair. Many were malnourished and chronically ill.

During the Taliban era, young girls and women were denied access to health care, employment and education. Parents supported non-formal schools and many Afghan people risked their lives to keep their children learning. Amid the rubble and fear, the people of Afghanistan never lost hope.

An eight-year-old girl works in an ironsmith's shop in Kabul. She does not go to school because her father needs her to work.









“I always hoped that behind the darkness, there was light.”

[Head teacher, Kabul]

A girl washes clothes in a pool of muddy water in the Maslakh camp, set up in the western city of Herat for some 140,000 people displaced from their homes.

Temperatures dropped below freezing at night and many new arrivals had no shelter at all.



For more than five years, girls were banned from the classroom in over 90 per cent of the country.

“Our recent history is a result of ignorance. People see education as a way of avoiding future tragedies like the ones we’ve had in the past.”

[Headmaster, Shomali Plains]

Abdul, 12, lost his right leg in a landmine explosion when he was 7. The landmine killed his brother who brought it home thinking it was a toy.





“During the Taliban regime, the community protected the teachers by hiding the lessons in their homes and never letting the secret out.”

[Headmistress, Kabul]

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Dasht-e-Barchi Education Centre No.1 in Kabul has no windowpanes, heat, furniture, carpets or lights. Fifteen unpaid teachers instruct 800 students in three shifts. The school is one of 95 run by a local non-governmental organization.







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Years of war and neglect  
had shattered the  
country's educational  
system.

## Preparing for launch

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When rebuilding first began, 60 per cent of the country's more than 7,000 schools were destroyed or in no condition to receive students. More than 100 had landmines on school grounds or in the surrounding area. Half did not have access to a safe water source and almost 40 per cent did not have adequate sanitation facilities.

With international support, the Afghan government rebuilt the country's education system from the ground up. Buildings were readied, teachers were mobilized and street-side murals and posters advertised the reopening of schools. Planes, jeeps – even donkeys – were used to get millions of books and teaching materials into the classrooms.

Making furniture for schools in Kabul, a CARE project.





“Education is the foundation of society. People are aware of its importance. As schools are reconstructed, the country is reconstructed.”

[Principal, Parwan Province]

'Schools-in-a-box' are unloaded at Kabul airport. Each box contains supplies and materials for one teacher and up to 80 students. More than 10,000 schools-in-a-box, nearly 3 million textbooks, 40,000 stationery kits and 18,000 chalkboards were among the supplies and materials provided by UNICEF for Afghanistan's 'Back to School' campaign in March 2002.



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School supplies being loaded onto trucks at Kabul airport.

A 'Back to School' message saying "Come, let's read!" is painted on a wall in Kabul.



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Members of the British International Security Assistance Force move school supplies from a UNICEF/Ministry of Education warehouse to the schoolmaster's home in western Kabul.

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Ali Ahmed, 70, a painter for 60 years, pauses from work on a classroom at the Abdul Hadi Dawi school in Kabul.



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Teachers attending a Ministry of Education training session.

Registration office of the Abdul Hadi Dawi school, Kabul.

“There are so many people who have returned to the country who believe things will get better. We all hope for a lasting peace.”

[Headmistress, Herat Province]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ





“Education can lead to peace and stability. It doesn’t have to wait for it.”

[Sharad Sapra  
UNICEF Country Representative, Afghanistan]

In Kabul, a street  
photographer takes a  
school registration photo.

School registration photos  
were necessary because  
many children have the  
same name.



# Doors open

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On 23 March 2002, more than 3,000 schools across Afghanistan opened their doors for the start of the school year. A massive campaign to get schools up and running cleared the way for more than 3 million children to attend school, many of whom had never seen the inside of a classroom.

A festive celebration marked the opening of the new school year in Afghanistan.





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Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, arrives at the school opening launch.

“To the children and young people of Afghanistan I would like to say...Your parents, your teachers, your government and many others around the world have worked hard to offer you a fresh start in school. That is our responsibility as adults. Now it is your turn: Make the most of it. Listen to your teachers, learn everything you can, ask questions and keep your minds open to ideas. And never let anyone take school away from you. It is your right – and that goes for both boys and girls.”





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“Today tears flow from the eyes of our people, but these are tears of happiness, because our children, our daughters and sons, are going to school. These are tears of pride.”

H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai,  
Chairman of the Interim  
Administration of  
Afghanistan, speaks at the  
school opening launch.

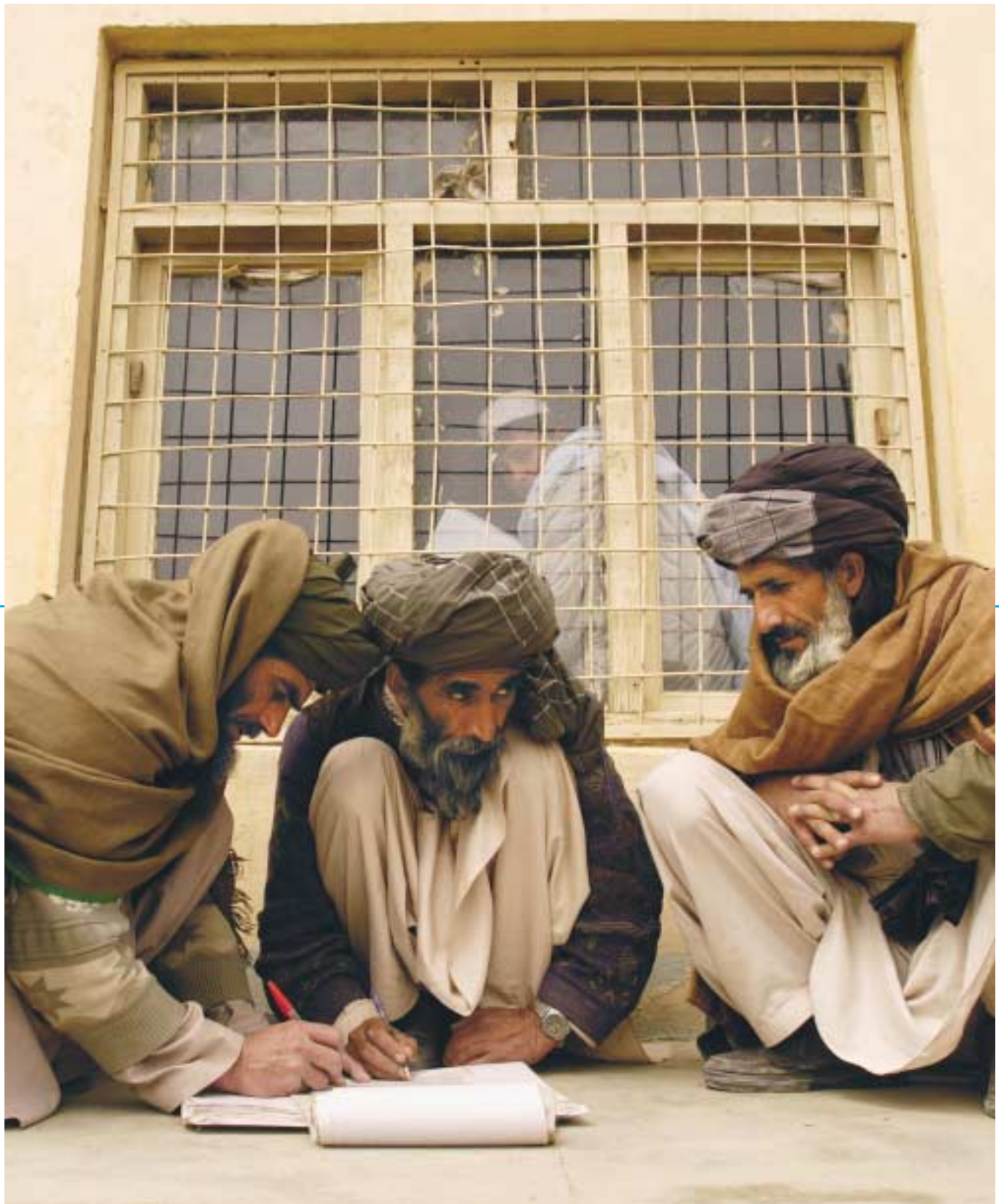
# Back to school

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The beginning of the school year marked a turning point in the lives of millions of Afghan girls and women. Children – a third of them girls – streamed into classrooms across the country to make up for lost time. Women reclaimed their place in the education system as teachers, principals and education advisers.

A girl writes in her new notebook at the Ghulam Haider school in Kabul.





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“I am pleased to be able to come back to school once more. Now I am studying properly and this is a great time for me and for my friends. I went to the home school because I knew that learning was important for me, and for my future. But coming to a real school again is the best thing.”

[11-year-old girl]

A school for deaf children in Kabul, run by the Hearing Impaired Foundation for Afghanistan, a local non-governmental organization.

Teachers grade exams outside the district education office in Maidan Shar, Wardak Province.



Education is helping children and families establish a routine in their daily lives.



As children learn, they gain confidence and skills, which give them hope for a better future.

# A bridge for development

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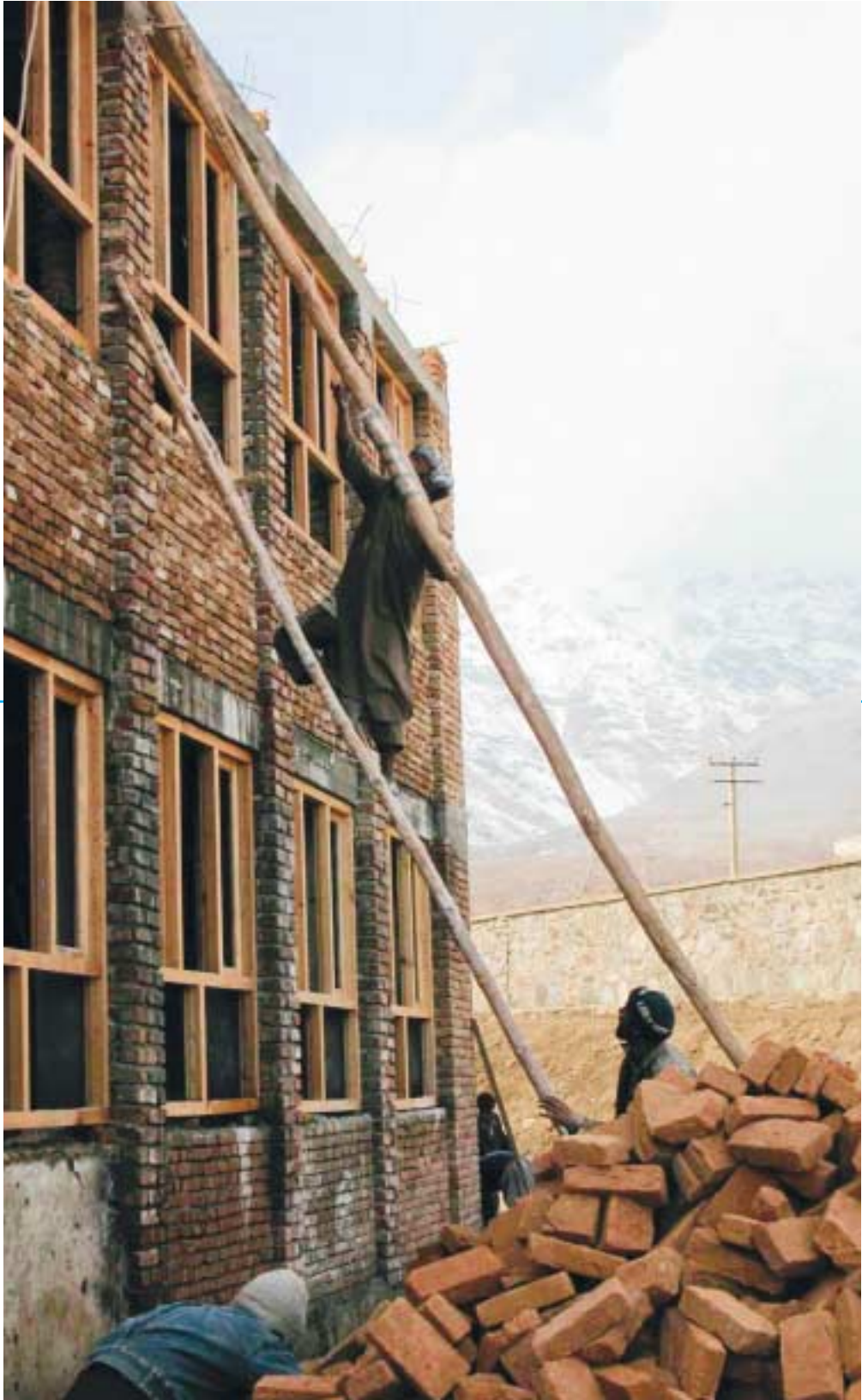
The people of Afghanistan have demonstrated that education can be the bridge that transforms an emergency situation into one of hope and promise.

Today, Afghan citizens continue to work for reconstruction and peace in their country. The Afghan Ministry of Education continues to ready and improve schools, putting extra effort into tackling the barriers that prevent Afghan girls from getting into and staying in school. With courage and resolve, they remain committed to ensuring that all Afghan children are able to fulfil their right to an education.

Sorting and packing school supplies at a Ministry of Education supply centre before the start of the 2003 school year.







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The building continues.



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“Children hold umbrellas while they write to protect themselves from the sun and the rain.”  
[Headmistress, Kabul]

Many schools run three shifts, and classes are held in hallways, outdoors and in tents to accommodate the massive numbers of children who want to study.

# A crossroads

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This is a defining moment in the history of Afghanistan. The international community must play its part to ensure that this period remains one of hope and opportunity.



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“Take our voices to the world. We suffered so many years without education. Tell everyone that Afghanistan is learning again.”

[Teacher, Kabul]

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