



## AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING ANNUAL REPORT 2020



*My dearest friends and colleagues, a new year has arrived.  
To overcome the struggles and suffering of COVID,  
let us stand together, put differences aside, be wise and humble.  
There is enough wealth in the world; let us be conscious of those  
in need. Let us spread our love with generosity.*

**I sincerely thank all those who support AIL— for your kindness, love and generosity.  
It was a challenging year for everyone —  
Insha'Allah (god willing) this new year will be better.  
I pray for health, happiness and peace around the world.**



Dear Friends,

The past year was a challenging one for the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) due to the pandemic. As soon as it became clear how wide-reaching the effects of the global crisis would be, my staff set to work adapting AIL programs to cater to the changing needs of the people we serve. The shutdown meant loss of jobs, families desperate for economic support, and many around the world left with no clue how to fight the spread of COVID-19.

From February, AIL began providing aid, cooked meals, personal protective equipment (PPE), and information on how to contain the virus on Radio Meraj, AIL's educational radio station. Our program donated sanitization supplies to support government health services, set up a 50-bed hospital to treat COVID patients, and continues to provide health care at clinics while educating patients about the Coronavirus.

It was vital to continue education, especially for children in quarantine at home, so we adapted our education programs to distance learning. My staff has been able to sustain this effort over many months, longer than we initially expected. Later, schools and Learning Centers were able to reopen with strict sanitization and social distancing protocols in place. While far from ideal, the return of young people to school and some degree of normalcy was critical to stave off another crisis of lost education, child marriage, and domestic violence. The effort to recover from the pandemic continues in 2021 – as does AIL's work to care for the most vulnerable in our communities.

2020 brought another change for me as I took on the role of CEO and President of Creating Hope International, AIL's first fiscal sponsor in the USA.

I am most grateful for the support and contributions of our valued donors and grantors, without whom our work would not be possible. Thank you so much,

Sakena

Dr. Sakena L. Yacoobi  
Founder and CEO,  
Afghan Institute of Learning and Creating Hope International

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# AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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## Awards and Speaking Engagements

Dr. Yacoobi is a respected leader and valued speaker in the fields of education, health, leadership, human rights, women's empowerment, culture revival, innovation, community involvement, and refugee issues.

She was honored to be named an Aurora Humanitarian in 2020 by the committee of the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity. This honor recognizes an individual for their humanitarian work and is awarded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

Before the pandemic restricted travel, Sakena was able to attend a conference on peace in Korea, the Universal Peace Federation's World Summit. She was delighted to address the Inter-religious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) entitled "Toward a World of Lasting Peace" - in which we discussed the role of religion, inter-religious dialogue, and faith-based organizations.



**Dr. Yacoobi speaking at the IAPD Event**

Sakena also received the Stand Up Leadership Award in 2020 at the International Convention in Dallas, Texas. The convention was attended by 3,000 youth from around the world, encouraging youth to engage in large scale advocacy to impact humanity's trajectory. Sakena spoke four times at the convention - at the Leadership Luncheon, Community Reception, Foundation LEADS Plenary, and Foundation Leadership Lab. The speeches focused on the new generation of youth leaders, civic engagement, diversity, and the environment.



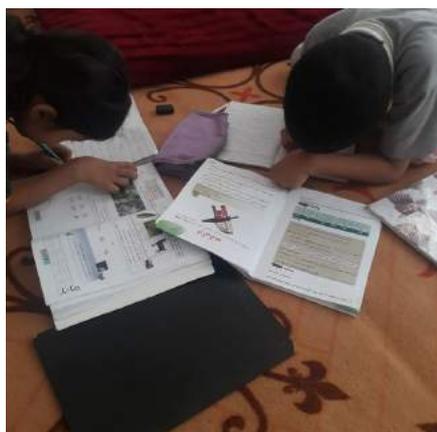
**Dr. Yacoobi received the Stand Up Leadership Award and spoke at the International Convention in Dallas, TX**

During lockdown in Michigan, Sakena attended many zoom meetings and continued to reach out to donors and grantors during this challenging time.

# Education

Education is crucial as it grants knowledge, increases an individual's capacity, and transforms the mindset. Women, in particular, realize their full potential and can effectively contribute to the functioning of family and society. The men in the family witness their women's capabilities and become more respectful of their opinions. The women, who have been educated, see the life-changing impact. They seek to expand their skill base with more sophisticated learning such as leadership workshops, ensuring their daughters grow up educated.

There was a government-mandated closure of schools and centers for a number of months. AIL staff designed and implemented a first-of-its-kind distance education plan which involved education packs, videos produced by teachers, and use of social media tools such as Telegram and WhatsApp. All grades were able to continue their studies at home. Parents were engaged in the process and very appreciative while students were glad to have some structure to their day.



**School time at home**

Despite the pandemic, 3 new centers were opened in 2020. The total number of centers operating is now 48. Classes offered at centers cover a wide range of subjects- In Herat, the most popular classes are literacy, tailoring, Arabic, English, and Math. Computer and English classes continue to be a growing subject of interest for all students.



**Children at school**



**Tailoring is a skill that can lead to starting a small business**

Tailoring is a popular class at the 29 centers that offer this course. It is often the first-class women take. It is a gateway class, as once they complete it, women feel empowered, realize their capacity to learn, and seek to take literacy or other subjects. Women want to learn how to make clothes for their families but they also want business, communication, and accounting skills so they can become small business entrepreneurs. 70% of tailoring graduates go on to open small businesses for themselves or to work for tailoring companies.

Tahera said, *“The students from this center impressed me and I was waiting for a while to get into the center’s classes. I just finished miniature painting and sewing classes. After finishing the training courses, I received an offer from a manufacturing company. It was great because that was the first income I received in my life. I could pay for my school, internet expenses and help my family. I have always wanted to be a successful painter and have my own gallery. I was able to finish designing class at AIL. I learned about how to design, miniature, and make dresses. Now I am getting prepared for the university entrance exam. I have started my own business, too. I run a dressmaking class and have many students. I teach the classes and help other disadvantaged women. Thank you AIL for changing my life”* The tailoring equipment was turned over to COVID PPE production as soon as the severe shortage of facemasks and gowns was apparent. Teachers and tailoring graduates worked long hours and produced thousands of items of PPE which were distributed to AIL facilities, government offices, and the public, reaching over 21,000 families.



**The function of the centers has evolved over time and now act as women's safe place for networking, a social environment where friendships are formed, troubles shares and group problem-solving takes place**

Students at Learning Centers receive lessons in basic accounting, business management, health, human rights, democracy, leadership, and core values such as respect, responsibility, trust, and peace. Education is the key to reducing early marriages, early pregnancy and maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan.

Access to literary material is limited in many poor communities in Afghanistan. Learning Centers maintain their own libraries where students and staff benefit from having access to diverse reading materials and have a safe, quiet place to study.



Literacy is a life-changing skill for many women enabling them to gain independence in household management and a larger role in community affairs.



### **Reading and Literacy classes**

The four-month-long Mobile Literacy Class for women and older girls continue to be in demand with long wait lists. This class is unique, teaching literacy through texting on mobile phones, which are provided to students. AIL developed its own teacher's guide and curriculum for this course.



Computer literacy, is a highly marketable job skill, with many students gaining employment after completing course work in this area. Some students were able to continue their studies at home during the worst of the pandemic, while others without internet attended the computer center one day a week.

### **Technology is today's access to knowledge**

The acquisition of English language skills is highly valued for both studying and the workplace. AIL recently opened a center dedicated to teaching English.

Pre-school education is another area of growth. AIL was one of the first organizations to provide early childhood education. We developed our own curriculum, now offered at 11 sites. These very young children learn traditional subjects such as alphabets, colors, numbers, the English alphabet, and topics such as peace, respect, trust, sharing, love, and forgiveness.



**Early learning is key in the foundation to developing confident, successful and motivated students.**

**Culture Revival** has been at the core of AIL’s goals for a long time. Cultural revival aims to help Afghans recover their culture, sense of history, and historic tradition as a peaceful society. AIL offers classes in traditional Afghan arts and crafts such as carpet weaving, embroidery, tile making, glasswork, calligraphy, and miniature painting. AIL has one center in Herat’s historic complex, the Citadel, which focuses solely on traditional arts and crafts. Afghan poetry is also promoted at its Love and Forgiveness Conferences, the poetry is incorporated into the AIL curriculum.



**Carpet weaving is keeping traditional culture alive and empowering women to have a sustainable life**

## Healthcare

### Health Clinics

Our health program provided 231,038 health treatments in 2020. There are six main clinics, including one at an orphanage, and one at a center for the disabled. Outside of the main clinics, there are outreach clinics at five AIL Learning Centers and 14 Community Health Worker (CHW) posts. Each clinic provides medical treatment, reproductive health services, nutrition care, preventive care, pre and post-natal care, and health education. AIL has always combined its quality healthcare with health education so that all clinic patients and their families leave their visit well-informed.



**Healthcare services during the pandemic**

COVID-19 necessitated changes at the clinics with regard to sanitation procedures and an increase in demand as several other local clinics shut down. Staff worked extra hours to accommodate patient care, with COVID-19 patients being referred to government hospitals and other patients being treated in house by AIL staff.



**Clinical laboratory work**



**Pharmacy**



**After touring space offered by the community, the AIL COVID-19 hospital opened. AIL supplied beds, medical supplies and personnel to treat patients.**

**During the pandemic, the Ministry of Public Health urgently requested assistance from AIL. Medicine, sanitization supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) were donated to the Ministry.**





### **AIL donation of supplies to the government**

AIL introduced counseling for families during the lockdown. COVID-19 exacerbated existing mental health issues caused by decades of crisis in Afghanistan.

A major focal point of the health program is women's health and reproductive care. In 2020, there were 15,783 reproductive health patients including 9,549 who received contraceptives. 253 babies were delivered on-site at clinics and 20 by community health workers (CHWs) at home.

Health clinics administered a total of 59,245 vaccinations in the year. Some patients who are unable to visit a clinic are reached via mobile vaccinators who go out to villages on foot or bicycle.



### **Vaccinations at AIL clinics**

When AIL performed their child nutritional status assessment in 2020, 26,235 children were evaluated and 1,944 were found to be malnourished. To continuously address this issue, the clinics run intensive nutrition programs, teaching mothers about proper nutrition, giving cooking demonstrations and feeding on site.



The Community Health Worker Program in the Herat Region continues to be supported by AIL clinics at Jaghartan and Maladan. During the year, CHWs made 36,579 visits to families. These CHWs offer frontline medical care in rural villages. They deal with basic care, preventive care, pre and postnatal care, and referring patients to the two main Herat clinics as needed.

## Health Education

Circulating accessible educational information about the COVID-19 virus became a top priority for the AIL health education program. Our health staff regularly provide programming on health matters to the private station Radio Meraj, which serves the Herat area. The health education program produced posters and leaflets for patients, and distributed them in the community.



## Health Workshops

In 2020, 172,538 people attended health education sessions or workshops. The program includes intensive multi-day workshops and mini three-hour workshops on single health topics for women and girls. This year a new session was created with a focus on COVID-19 information.



**Reproductive Health workshops help women stay healthy - topics include hygiene, sanitation, vaccinations, infectious diseases, and pre and post natal care.**

## COVID-19 and Emergency Aid

AIL provides emergency food aid parcels when needed due to natural disasters such as drought, floods, and extreme winter weather. Food supplies include items such as oil, beans, rice, eggs, milk, dates, meat, bread, tea, and sugar. Recipients are identified by leaders in the local communities that we support. AIL also provides household items when possible. In August when there was severe flooding in Parwan Province, AIL distributed blankets, floor mats, shovels, and clothing were given to impacted families.



**Preparing aid packages**

COVID-19 demanded great efforts from AIL to provide extra aid to the communities. "We looked out the window and saw a crowd gathering outside the gate. They were desperate for help, they had lost their jobs and needed food now. They were without masks and had nowhere to get them and did not understand how to protect themselves from the virus. We immediately started providing cooked meals, food parcels, and our tailoring classes converted to PPE production with Radio Meraj broadcasting virus information and safety precautions." (AIL Herat office)



Food packages distributed



**Face mask and face shield production**



**Delivering PPE door to door**

# Training

## Teacher Training

Quality teaching is the foundation for a successful education system. AIL provides extensive, unique and innovative teacher training, ensuring that teachers receive continued education in the latest innovative, most effective methods.

Dr. Yacoobi is known as the Mother of Education in Afghanistan. She says, "The only way for a country to progress and prosper is to pay attention to its educational infrastructure. Teachers are the foundation of this process. In fact, they provide an improved quality of life for the future makers of society and serious attention must be paid to this influential group."

In 2020, AIL trained 247 teachers (121 female) in educational technique seminars, in accordance with international standards. Teachers were also participants in several workshops on a diverse range of topics such as leadership, love and forgiveness, democracy, good citizenship, and the role of women in peace.



*"I am Qudsia from Balkh Province and I am a teacher. After ten years as a refugee in Pakistan, I returned to Afghanistan with my mother, father, and five sisters. Both my parents were workers and my mother got little education in the refugee camp. My mother always said that she spent a life of hardship as a refugee. But literacy, teaching, and sewing instruction saved her from hardship -- which was all due to our "Mother of Education" Sakena Yacoobi.*



*This year the inspector assessed my teaching and suggested I attend the new methodology seminar run by AIL in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif. I learned a lot at the seminar such as teaching methods, materials, and principles, exams and evaluations, grading, psychology, lesson planning, student psychology, and discipline." (Teacher at a workshop)*

## Capacity Building Training

AIL's capacity building program aims to increase the ability of the Afghan people to be independent and equip them with the skills to navigate life independently and successfully. All people have potential that needs to be nurtured, they should be given the knowledge of their rights and how to advocate for themselves. Education and leadership training are intertwined in the rebuilding effort of the country.



The program includes workshops on topics such as peace, democracy, elections, rule of law, leadership, and human rights. In 2020, AIL held workshops on good citizenship, the laws of children's rights, a peace conference, an e-learning research center conference. AIL continues its work empowering women to be leaders and also includes men in leadership training

*"This workshop has helped me to understand what leadership is and it inspired me to apply for jobs I feel I can handle anything that might come up. I see all things in a positive way and I feel very confident in making my own decisions. I am now the manager of a Learning Center in Balkh and I love my job. I also appreciate how women must avoid all harassment and focus on the job and work to that end."*(Workshop participant)



**Peace and Leadership Conference**

## Conferences

AIL Peace Conference participants included social activists, university professors, college students, schoolteachers, community members who work in the peace process, and others who want peace to permeate and prevail in Afghan society. The conference was designed to help them understand what peace is and how to create and sustain a peaceful community.

*"I believe that peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have and all that we are, towards creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are."* (A participant)



**Deputy Governor of Herat and several officials have participated in AIL Peace Conferences. They will replicate this conference other provinces.**

**Peace conference, women have a vital role in peacemaking**

## Women's Empowerment Group

Since its founding in 1995, one of AIL's major goals has been to empower through education. Afghan women, some trained by AIL, have gone on to earn master's and doctoral degrees at universities.

AIL realized that many of these women needed a greater understanding of leadership, and to develop leadership skills so they could rise to positions of higher authority and responsibility.

The Women's Empowerment Group (WEG) course is a year-long program. The aim is to assist the women to become more capable leaders who can have more influence in their community and the country. The program has created a network for women to share experiences and learn from each other.

The subjects they study include management, leadership, democracy, economics, COVID-19 virus, the outlook for peace in Afghanistan and the role of education in peacemaking, women's solidarity, education, culture, health, environment, communication, public speaking, and creativity. The groups feature prestigious speakers selected by the AIL Academic Advisor, who is proficient in communication.

The WEG group meets bi-weekly and at the end of the year, they earn a certificate. Now they are prepared to provide services to the public with the necessary skills and confidence



## Legal Aid Clinic for Women

The legal clinic provides disadvantaged women with legal advice and representation in Herat and surrounding areas. The clinic, which opened in 2015, is based in the AIL Herat office and staffed by a team of five experienced female lawyers. Many women cannot afford legal aid but are able to receive assistance through our legal office at no cost to them.

In 2020, the legal clinic handled 66 cases. The majority of cases are concluded within a month. The cases included issues such as robbery, divorce, kidnapping, violence against women, traffic accidents, business, inheritance, child abuse, alimony, early marriage, and drug trafficking. The lawyers participated 48 times in a legal awareness show on Radio Meraj, informing women and men of their rights, educating people on the laws of the country, and responding to call-in questions.



**Awareness through Radio Meraj**

## Publications

A magazine called Nida-e-Taleem published twice a year by AIL includes content that is educational and news - orientated, emphasizing literacy, and health. The January issue included the topics of crisis management, peace, justice, the role of education, psychology, children, creativity, and online courses.

The most recent edition included articles on COVID-19: how to protect yourself, the negative impact of the pandemic on children's education, empathy amidst COVID trauma, and what AIL facilities are doing to help with the pandemic. Other topics included: impact of war on children, learning English at home, youth development, women's rights regarding alimony, technology, and using Windows 10.

The magazine gives updates on AIL's work, information on AIL's Learning Centers, and Dr. Yacoobi's private radio station, Radio Meraj. Copies of the magazine are widely distributed and available at all AIL facilities such as offices, libraries, centers, clinics, official government offices and ministries in Kabul and Herat, and various NGO offices.



## Research Center

AIL Research and Study Center provides an academic and intellectual space to address scientific, cultural, social, and political issues of Afghanistan. The center conducted two studies in 2020.



AIL's cultural section worked on designs for new books. AIL publishes books and teaching manuals to support its educational programs such as teacher training, the Women's Empowerment Group, and mobile literacy.



The Research Center presents an E-learning paper

The goal of the first study "AIL Scholarships" was to assess the extent and effectiveness of scholarships offered by AIL. Researchers sought to determine whether the scholarships have improved the educational and social status of recipients.

The research findings show that the AIL scholarships have been effective in increasing cultural and social capital --, or in other words, increasing the knowledge, awareness, social status, and job status of individuals.

COVID-19 presented an opportunity for the research team to complete studies on e-learning/distance education in Afghanistan. The research evaluated the views of students and university professors about online teaching or e-Learning in order to elucidate the situation of e-learning in Afghanistan.

The results show that at the individual level, the willingness of professors and students to engage with e-learning is low. At the same time, the ability of professors and students to successfully use software and web-based learning spaces is unacceptably low.

Additionally, Afghanistan is significantly far from achieving universal quality education and lags behind other nations in terms of e-learning. As many have seen during the year, e-learning requires specific supplies, hardware, and software infrastructure. Many communities are unable to obtain needed supplies making it impossible for them to participate in e-learning which disrupts the education of many women, girls, and children.

The third study is 50% complete and is evaluating the level of teachers' job satisfaction. Completion of this research is expected in early 2021. Through the year, the head of the Research Center made appearances on Radio Meraj sometimes as a guest and other times as a host speaking on social and cultural affairs. Staff participated in multiple conferences.

## The Environment

Recognizing the importance of environmental literacy even during the pandemic, AIL strived this year to ensure that people were educated on a multitude of topics related to caring for the Earth and their local environment. Activities and topics included tree planting, distributing information about the virus, local markets and farmers, awareness of air, water, sound, light pollution, and waste disposal.



**WEG plants trees**

## Orphanage

AIL has supported a girls and boys orphanage that cares for more than 500 children. The orphanage has been run by the Afghan government for 12 years, as a boarding school for 4 - 18 years old. The children are often found abandoned in the streets. AIL provides educational classes on computers, tailoring, manners/etiquette, reading, writing, and gardening.

At each of the facilities, children have access to a clinic (a doctor and a nurse), a cook, a cleaner, a gardener, administration, and security. Additionally, AIL provides books, supplies, and three times a year, including on holidays such as Eid, clothing.



## Peer Herat Disabled Center

AIL has supported the Peer Herat Disabled Center for 12 years. AIL provides job opportunities, gardening skills, clothing three times a year, books, and a clinic staffed with a doctor and nurse.



# Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private Enterprise: Radio Meraj and TV Meraj

Radio Meraj is an award-winning private station set up to reach people with education, news, and information programming and to expand the reach of AIL's message. The station is housed in AIL Herat's office and AIL staff assists with programming. Programs are broadcast 18 hours a day from 6 am to midnight. It is estimated that the station broadcasts to an area with 2 million residents in seven of eight districts of Herat Province. It is a more progressive radio station than its competitors. When you get in a taxi in Herat, it is highly likely that you will hear Radio Meraj!



**The Radio Meraj team**



**Frequent broadcasts about the virus**

Radio Meraj has been instrumental in spreading information about COVID-19 and aiding AIL's health department in its efforts to educate, inform, and encourage people to treat the virus with great caution. The station aired thousands of ads about the virus. The audience received donations of masks, sanitization supplies, and health packages. Women were encouraged to sew face masks and encourage hand washing.

*A listener from the 10th district of the city of Herat had this to say: "Today the world is caught up in the COVID-19 situation. I get all my information about the virus through Radio Meraj. This helps to keep me and my family safe. One of our neighbors had symptoms of the virus such as a dry cough, sore throat, and fever. My neighbor told me about his sickness and I contacted the Public Health Administration. An ambulance came and isolated him until he could get a COVID-19 test result. If I had not gained virus awareness from Radio Meraj, my neighbor would not have known what to do and could have infected others. Thank you Radio Meraj."*

Meraj Radio also aided in AIL's distance education program during the lockdown and had a one-hour morning program for five months about school subjects, in coordination with the Education Department of Herat Province.

## TV Meraj



**TV Meraj reporters in the field**

# Professor Sakena Yacoobi Private Schools (PSYPS)

AIL also provides technical assistance such as teacher training, curriculum development, leadership training, student health exams, and other staff assistance to Dr. Yacoobi's private high schools. The quality of these programs has resulted in the schools receiving excellence awards from the Ministry of Education.



**Yacoobi Private School student**



**Socially distanced classroom**

AIL supports computing and coding classes and the intensive two-year Youth Leaders Course. Students learn about a variety of leadership topics as well as other subjects such as English, politics, democracy, and community projects. They do course work, reading, and presentations, and engage in field trips such as visiting an AIL Learning Center, community clean-ups, and visiting Radio Meraj.



**The Youth Leaders Course**



**Students enjoy participating in team sports**



**Music education is part of the curriculum**

## Social Media Presence

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi spoke in videos to encourage people to follow hygiene rules, social distancing and to be good to their families while they are in quarantine. Other messages and videos covered: education, healthcare, peace, forgiveness, and citizenship. People shared the videos on social media and networks. Currently, over 100,000 people follow the AIL Facebook page.

## Project in Development

### AIL's Women's University

This year, in collaboration with Lynn University in the USA, AIL staff began researching the challenges and issues involved in opening a women's university in Herat.

# Financial Statement

## Afghan Institute of Learning Financial Statement for the year January to December 2020

<b>Income</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Grants	\$ 928,158
Donors	\$ 261,200
Programs	\$ 8,366
Events	\$ -
Interest	\$ 13,224
	<u>\$ 1,210,948</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b><u>\$ 1,210,948</u></b>

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Materials & Supplies	\$ 89,080
Printing & Duplicating	\$ 5,802
Communications	\$ 15,275
Site Rental	\$ 30,092
Site Utilities	\$ 24,155
Large & Small Equipment	\$ 16,914
Maintenance	\$ 4,646
Bank Charges	\$ 6,561
Student Stipends	\$ 13,395
Scholarships	\$ 5,818
Transportation	\$ 26,399
Travel	\$ 33,469
Staff Salaries & Benefits	\$ 745,995
Fees/Conference Membership	\$ 5,502
	<u>\$ 1,023,103</u>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b><u>\$ 1,023,103</u></b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b><u>\$ 187,845</u></b>

\*\*\*Includes all AIL income received in US for the fiscal year only

\*Uses all income for AIL from US and AF/Pak including individual donors and GG 10%

# *Afghan Institute of Learning*

Kabul and Herat, Afghanistan



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## **Creating Hope International**

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## **DONATE TODAY**

By credit card: [www.creatinghope.org](http://www.creatinghope.org)

By check: payable to Creating Hope International; send to PO Box 1058

Dearborn, MI 48121, USA

(CHI acts as fiscal sponsor for AIL in the USA)

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