



TAIWAN FOUNDATION
for DEMOCRACY

財法臺灣民主基金會
團人

PRESS RELEASE

**Dr. Sima Samar wins Taiwan Foundation for Democracy's
2008 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award**

TAIPEI, 10 November 2008 – Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) Chairman Wang Jin-pyng announced today that Dr. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and founder of the Shuhada Organization, has been selected as the winner of the 2008 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award (ADHRA). Samar is recognized for her contributions to advancing human rights and especially women's rights and welfare in Afghanistan. She will formally receive the Award sculpture and a grant of US\$100,000 at a ceremony in Taipei on December 10th, International Human Rights Day.

Samar was the first Hazara woman to earn a medical degree from Kabul University. She fled to Pakistan in 1984 and remained in exile for 17 years, during which time she founded the Shuhada Organization in 1989 to provide medical care and educational opportunities to Afghan women and children. Since 2002, she has served as the Chairperson of the newly established Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, laying the institutional groundwork for human rights protections in Afghanistan.

"Dr. Samar has devoted her life to fighting for freedom and democracy in Afghanistan, putting her life in immense risk and overcoming numerous obstacles," said Chairman Wang, noting that the ADHRA and other awards which Samar has received not only represent international recognition of her contributions, but also help protect her personal safety in Afghanistan.

Samar was chosen from a pool of 30 candidates representing 18 countries, after a rigorous two-stage review process. Chairman Wang pointed out that since the ADHRA was established in 2006, it is especially noteworthy that the second and third annual Awards were both awarded to women. Last year's (2007) ADHRA was presented to Burmese doctor Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic on the Thai-Burmese border.

Liao Dachi, member of the ADHRA preliminary review board and professor of political science at National Sun Yat-Sen University, commented on the harsh environment in which Samar has worked for Afghan women's rights and welfare. Afghanistan faces a dire lack of medical and educational resources, and women lived under severe oppression during the Taliban's rule. Even today, life expectancy for women is only 43 years, and rates of adult female illiteracy remain extremely high. Samar has had to argue before international organizations such as the United Nations that mistreatment of Afghan women and children should be judged according to basic human rights principles, rather than characterized as traditional cultural practices, said Liao.

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy established the annual Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award in 2006 to support individuals and organizations that have actively promoted democratic development or advocated human rights through peaceful means in Asia. International members of the 2008 ADHRA final review board included: Dr. Nisuke Ando, former Chairman of the UN Human Rights Committee and Director of the Kyoto Human Rights Institute; Dr. Alex Boraine, Chairperson of the International Center for Transitional Justice and former Deputy Chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Ms. Asma Jahangir, Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; Mr. Alejandro Toledo, former President of Peru; and Dr. Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic and winner of the 2007 ADHRA.

The Shuhada Organization aims to provide Afghan women and children with medical care and educational opportunities. It is the oldest Afghan non-governmental organization and the largest woman-led NGO in the region. Under Samar's leadership, Shuhada now operates 12 clinics and 4 hospitals in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as 71 schools in Afghanistan and 3 schools for Afghan refugees in Quetta, Pakistan, educating over 48,000 girls and boys.

Samar is the recipient of numerous international awards, including the 1994 Community Leadership Award from the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation in the Philippines, the 2001 John Humphrey Freedom Award from Rights and Democracy in Canada, and the 2004 Eleanor Roosevelt Award from the Feminist Majority Foundation in the United States.



In this photo: TFD Chairman Wang Jin-pyng (center) announces that Dr. Sima Samar of Afghanistan is the winner of the 2008 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award. TFD President Lin Wen-cheng (right) and Professor Liao Dachi (left) also spoke at the press conference.

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