



Face to Face Campaign for Women

Mary Banotti, "Much more needs to be done."



United Nations Goodwill Ambassador Visits Afghanistan
By Aisatou Ngong

UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador and Face to Face Spokesperson for Ireland, Mary Banotti, spent ten days (21-31 March 2002) visiting Pakistan and

Afghanistan. There, she examined the healthcare available to Afghan women. She also observed the work underway by the UNFPA; work to save the lives of Afghan women and girls.

In Afghanistan, Mary visited several maternity hospitals and clinics that had just begun to openly offer health services to women and children. Although she was encouraged to see healthy babies being delivered in the hospitals, Mary was also concerned about the health condition of many of the younger children who had bad coughs and chest infections ?obviously exacerbated by the living conditions and the cold temperatures during the winter months.

Tuberculosis (TB) is rampant in Afghanistan and in one small clinic, Mary observed queues of mothers, all wearing their Burqas, waiting to have their children vaccinated or administered antibiotics for infections.

In addition to numerous refugee camps in Pakistan, Mary visited the refugee camps around the Khyber Pass where an estimated seven thousand people were repatriated (voluntarily) to Afghanistan on a daily basis. These refugees were given \$100.00 and other basic assistance. Their applications were processed before nightfall in preparation for their passage over the border at the Khyber Pass. For the women and girls still living in the refugee camps, Mary assessed that they were still in "desperate need of even the most basic sanitary supplies such as birthing kits comprised of plastic sheets, a clean razor for cutting the umbilical cord and a piece of string for tying it.?"

"UNFPA has been carrying out critical work in saving the lives of Afghan women and girls, but much more needs to be done," according to Mary. Mary stressed how vitally important it is that the international community "maintain a high degree of interest to continue to support the new Government [of Afghanistan].?"

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