

TESTIMONY OF
NEA PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
HEARING ON

COMBATING TERRORISM THROUGH EDUCATION: THE
NEAR EAST & SOUTH ASIAN EXPERIENCE

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**Combating Terrorism through Education:
The Near East and South Asian Experience**

Testimony– PDAS Cheney
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on the important topic of educational reform in the Broader Middle East and North Africa. The President's vision to promote freedom and democracy in the region is about giving young people hope for their future – a positive future built on the prospect of opportunity and prosperity – that strengthens regional stability and our own national security.

In the area of education reform, we need to support efforts to ensure that schools in the region teach tolerance and prepare students to compete in the global economy. We need to work to improve literacy, particularly among women. We are willing to lend our strong support to ministries of education in the region that have demonstrated commitment to reform.

We also need to do more to ensure that our assistance touches, is seen by, and improves the lives of more people at the grass roots level in the countries to which we provide assistance. In the area of education, this can be achieved by making greater use of literacy programs, scholarships for women and girls to attend school, and support for programs — such as those in Alexandria, Egypt — that involve the private sector in education reform.

The Challenge

Fifty percent of the region's population is under the age of twenty. Economies across the region are not growing quickly enough — and are not sufficiently open to the outside world — to create jobs for these young people to fill. At the same time, rigid and closed political systems do not give citizens in many countries a voice in shaping their destiny or choosing their leaders. Finally, too many school systems across the region are failing to teach tolerance or to provide students with the tools they need to compete successfully in the global market place.

Regional stability and a reduction in the appeal of extremism depend on giving people in the region more power to shape their lives, their societies and their futures. This endeavor will require reform of political, economic and education systems and the empowerment of women. Reform efforts will need to ensure people have a democratic voice in the governance

of their countries, to strengthen the rule of law to protect citizens' rights, to modernize economic systems in order to create opportunity, and to facilitate access to quality education, particularly for women and girls, so that all citizens are properly equipped to participate fully in society.

The groundbreaking 2003 Arab Human Development Report was pivotal in drawing attention to the critical issue of failing education systems that produce citizens ill-equipped for the challenges of the modern world. The authors of the report stressed this point again in the newest Arab Human Development Report released this month. Progress in the region is inextricably linked to strong democratic institutions and economic growth, which are not possible without significant reforms in educational systems.

There is no question that implementing genuine educational reform is a difficult process that entails overcoming numerous hurdles and working through a series of challenges. The Broader Middle East and North Africa has some of the lowest literacy rates in the world — particularly among women. Over 75 million women are illiterate, as are over 45 million men. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Morocco are countries of particular concern. In Egypt alone, over 13 million Egyptian women contribute to a national female illiteracy rate of fifty-six percent - according to the United Nations.

Businesses in the region consistently report that national education systems are not producing graduates with the skills and qualifications needed by the private sector in order to compete in the modern, international marketplace. Basic education needs to be relevant to societal needs and work force requirements if the region is to make progress on economic growth and social development. So, support for indigenously-led efforts to train teachers, reform curricula, and provide vocational training is also important in helping to address the region's educational challenges.

The conversations on reform that are taking place throughout the Broader Middle East and North Africa are encouraging. And there are encouraging signs of change in the area of education in the region as well. As I already mentioned, the governorate of Alexandria in Egypt has been leading the way towards a school system characterized by greater local-level control and by strong collaboration and involvement on the part of parents and local businesses in shaping the education that is provided to their children.

The United States and its allies have clearly signaled their desire to support governments committed to education reform and to provide them with both material support and the benefit of their international experience .

At Sea Island, Georgia, the U.S. joined with G-8 partners and countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa in committing to work together to support regional political, economic and educational reform efforts, including support for the improvement of educational systems and a literacy initiative to impart literacy skills to an additional 20 million people by 2015. At the historic Forum for the Future in Rabat last December, G-8 and regional leaders reaffirmed these goals and agreed to convene a meeting of education ministers in Jordan this May to discuss the critical success factors necessary for reform. The education ministerial is sure to produce robust and constructive engagement and dialogue on this key set of issues.

The key for the United States is to allocate our resources in a targeted fashion that does not duplicate other donors' efforts. In addition, we need to take advantage of opportunities where governments are committed to reform.

The Resources

Over \$98 billion in assistance has been provided to the Broader Middle East and North Africa by the rest of the world over the last ten years. According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD countries provided in excess of \$74 billion in bilateral assistance between 1993 and 2003. The World Bank provided more than \$24 billion during the same period (primarily in loans, but also via a small number of grants).

Of the \$74 billion provided by the OECD countries over the last ten years, \$4 billion went to support education. \$2.4 billion of the \$24 billion provided by the World Bank was directed toward education during the same time frame.

The Donors

The World Bank, and Germany and France have been the largest providers of foreign assistance to the Broader Middle East and North Africa in the area of education. The Bank provided over \$2.4 billion in loans and grants between 1993 and 2003, while France and Germany provided approximately \$1.5 billion each. According to the OECD, the United States provided \$290 million over the same period; all of the U.S. money was provided in the form of grants.

The picture is somewhat different when it comes to foreign assistance for basic education. The World Bank is by far the largest donor; it provided over \$900 million between 1993 and 2003 — primarily in loans, but also via

grants. The U.S took second place with over \$190 million, all provided via grant assistance.

Education reform is a difficult thing to do in any context, but particularly in the Broader Middle East and North Africa. As I have described, a huge amount of assistance is being provided to education systems throughout the region. There are many programs and there are many players. And the United States is not the biggest player in this area either.

In recent years, the U.S. has significantly increased the amount of education assistance provided to the region. In fiscal year 2005, we will dedicate almost \$200 million to BMENA countries. The fiscal year 2006 budget requests \$270 million for education assistance to BMENA countries, an increase of 37 percent over the 2005 level.

Within the broader picture of total foreign assistance to education reform in the Broader Middle East and North Africa, we need to focus our activities and to ensure that we are not duplicating the effort of others.

Looking forward, the United States government will focus its technical assistance funding on ministries of education, which have demonstrated a true and tangible commitment to education system reform.

We will also focus our efforts towards the grass roots level by providing literacy programs and scholarships to attend or stay in school — particularly for women and young girls. In this way, we can ensure that our assistance is not wasted, has a tangible impact upon the lives of people in the countries we are assisting, is visible at the street level and achieves results.

In countries where government ministries of education have demonstrated a commitment to reform, we will of course stand ready to provide governments with the best support that we can mobilize. This means not just funding, but it also means concerted action together with other donors to make the fruits of international experience in reforming education systems available to our partners in the region.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the United States government has three primary avenues through which it directs bilateral assistance to education and educational exchanges in the Broader Middle East and North Africa:

- 1) USAID through development assistance and economic support funds;
- 2) The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; and
- 3) The U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative's policy and program initiatives.

My colleague, Mr. Kunder, will speak in more detail about USAID's activities in the region. I would like to take a moment to describe the Department of State's activities in the area of education reform.

The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) promotes democracy and reform through global exchange programs. With a 2005 appropriation of \$356 million, ECA exchanges will target youth and youth influencers around the world. ECA's special emphasis will be on countries with significant Muslim populations in order to reinforce positive trends toward economic and societal change through professional and academic exchanges.

ECA sponsors a number of programs which support teachers and teacher-trainers from the region, particularly in English language instruction, and provides them with firsthand opportunities to learn about the U.S. educational system, the principles of student-centered teaching, effective democratic school governance and parental involvement.

For example, the Afghanistan Teacher Education Project has brought more than 60 women educators from Afghanistan to the United States to enhance their professional and teacher training skills.

Similarly, the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program places new English language teachers from the Broader Middle East and North Africa on U.S. campuses for one academic year. They teach Arabic and other regional languages, and enroll in U.S. studies and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology classes. Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have been regular participants in the program.

The U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)

Let me now turn more directly to MEPI and its contribution to combating terrorism through education. Through MEPI we are linking the President's vision for democracy and freedom to our policy dialogue with governments in the Middle East. As such, MEPI partners with those countries that have demonstrated a clear, political commitment to enacting reform in the education sector.

The U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative has received \$293 million in appropriations since its inception. Close to a quarter of these funds, or approximately \$70 million, is being spent – in some cases in countries unserved by USAID – on promoting educational reform. MEPI's specific

emphasis is on: improving the quality of basic education; expanding access to basic education for all people, especially girls and women; and promoting skills development compatible with work force needs.

The President's 2006 budget requested \$30 million dollars for MEPI's education reform efforts. Of MEPI's current funding, twenty-five percent supports programs that facilitate curriculum reform, teacher training, and community and private sector involvement in education.

Based on new, innovative models, MEPI has helped launch creative alternatives for improving the quality of and access to education for children in the primary and secondary levels through its Partnership Schools Program. This program allows MEPI to promote school autonomy in systems that have traditionally been very centralized. MEPI anticipates that by fall 2005 we will be able to conduct an initial assessment of the impact of the program's innovative instructional and management methods in the classroom, and how the methodology translates into actual enhanced autonomy and freedom of choice among students, teachers, and institutions.

The 2002 Arab Human Development Report noted that the Arab world translates about 330 books annually, one fifth the number that Greece translates. The authors of the report also noted that the cumulative total of books translated since the times of Caliph Maa'moun (9th century) is 100,000, almost the average that Spain translates in one year.

In an effort to encourage independent reading, critical thinking, and analytical skills in young readers, MEPI launched "My Arabic Library," a major program that provides colorful and interesting Arabic language reading materials to 3rd and 4th grade classrooms in the region. MEPI can demonstrate that this program is having a tangible impact. 3,000 schools will receive more than one million books, targeting approximately 120,000 students and 6,000 teachers at its launch. In the long term, the program will contribute to a substantive change in the approach toward education.

MEPI's is targeted to respond quickly to emerging opportunities and to respond with programs targeted at the individual challenges faced by each country. Through the Arab Civitas civic education program, which is implemented in primary and secondary schools, MEPI also provides support to countries in the region wanting to build public awareness of civic rights and responsibilities. The program promotes an understanding of and commitment to democratic values and principles.

MEPI also has the flexibility to craft public-private partnerships to bring about effective education reform efforts. In Jordan, MEPI has partnered with the Ministry of Education and Cisco Learning to develop the Jordan Education Initiative, which provides a high-quality on-line curriculum and teacher training programs in the field of English. MEPI's education programs provide viable options and effective tools for people in the region who seek to implement reform in a manner that offers security and prosperity for their all of their people.

We are in the process of working with our embassies and USAID missions to update our country strategies in the area of reform, including education, and would be happy to discuss these with the Committee as the process unfolds.

Conclusion

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the United States government will continue to stress the need for positive change in education in our ongoing dialogue and relationships in the Broader Middle East and North Africa and beyond. Where governments demonstrate a commitment to reform we will work closely with them to help make their efforts succeed. We will also focus our effort towards the grass-roots level where we can be assured that our resources will have a tangible impact on individuals and their education.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions and to our discussion of this important issue.