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RELIEF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS WITH STATE DEPARTMENT TO INCREASE ‘GLOBAL CONNECTIONS’ WITH STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

*Los Angeles-Based Aid Organization to Leverage Its Network of Internet Learning Centers to
Connect Students with Peers in the United States and around the World*

Los Angeles, CA (1 August 2007) – The Department of State has again selected Los Angeles–based Relief International (RI) to implement its Global Connections and Exchange (GCE) program in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tajikistan and the West Bank. RI, a leading Los Angeles–based aid organization, has worked with local populations on five continents since 1990 to provide disaster relief, rebuild livelihoods and expand community involvement in government and decision making. The group’s education division – Schools Online – first began its work on the GCE project in 2004.

“We are both honored and excited by this unique opportunity to expand our work with the Afghan, Bangladeshi, Palestinian and Tajik people,” said Farshad Rastegar, RI CEO and President. “In addition to improving education practices in these regions, this program demonstrates to students the meaning and value of global citizenship – the roles they can play in their communities and the connections they share with peers around the world.”

In Afghanistan, for example, RI’s Internet Learning Centers have connected thousands of students and teachers to the Internet, more than 50% of whom are women. Among the highlights of the 2007 – 2008 GCE program will be the opportunity for students from various provinces in the regions to collaborate with each other online, and to communicate with students in the United States and other countries around the world. RI will also work with youth in leadership clubs to promote civic engagement and service. Two or three outstanding students from each country will be selected for a three-week trip to the United States to focus on youth activism and leadership training and to experience U.S. culture.

To further the professional development of educators in the four partner countries, RI field staff will prepare and empower teachers to conduct training sessions in schools and community centers in the regions most in need. Teachers at participating schools will take part in week-long workshops and will be encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues to develop innovative student-centered lesson plans. To build on this professional development program, two–three teachers from each of the participating countries will be selected to visit the United States to meet with partner teachers and to learn how students in this country benefit from the integration of technology in the classroom. Select U.S. teachers will also travel to partner countries to enhance their global awareness and their ability to introduce global topics and activities into their classrooms.

Relief International staff will work closely with Department of State personnel as the program unfolds.

“Increased connectivity is key to sustainable development,” added Rastegar. “It is our hope that by working with community leaders and teachers to increase students’ ability to communicate with each other and with the outside world, we will help develop a new generation more sensitive to other cultures and better positioned for long term success. We are proud to play our part.”

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About Relief International

Founded in 1990, Relief International is a non-profit humanitarian agency providing emergency, rehabilitation and development services to victims of conflicts and disasters all over the world. The organization’s work bridges the gap between immediate emergency relief and long-term community development. Accordingly, its teams are often the first to arrive when disaster strikes and the last to leave.

Learn more at www.reliefinternational.org.