S I M A S A M A R
Chair, Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
Founder and Director, Shuhada Organization

Dr. Sima Samar is the chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Samar convened, established, and has chaired the Commission since July 2002. It is the first Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan's history. In this position, Samar oversees the conduct of human rights education programs across the country, implementation of a nationwide women's rights education program, and monitoring and investigation of human rights abuses.

In 2005, Samar was appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Sudan.

From December 22, 2001 until June 22, 2002, Samar served as the deputy prime minister and minister of women's affairs for the interim administration of Afghanistan. Samar was one of only two women cabinet ministers in the transition government. In June 2002, Samar was elected as the vice-chair of the Loya Jirga Assembly.

During the interim administration, Dr. Samar established the first-ever Afghanistan Ministry of Women's Affairs. Under her leadership, buildings for the ministry were secured and rehabilitated and the ministry began advocacy, training, and service programs to help restore the rights of women and to improve their economic, political, legal, and social status. Among other accomplishments, the ministry won the right of women government employees to return to their jobs and to keep their seniority, secured the representation of women as 11 percent of the Loya Jirga delegates, and oversaw the re-entry of girls to schools.

Samar returned to Afghanistan to assume this cabinet post after 17 years in exile in Pakistan, where she founded and directs the Shuhada Organization in Quetta. The Shuhada Organization runs health, education, and income generation projects for women and girls in Afghanistan and those living as refugees in Pakistan. The Shuhada Organization is the oldest Afghan NGO working in the region, and the largest Afghan woman-led organization.

A leading authority on health care for Afghan women, Samar was graduated from Kabul University Medical College in 1982. She practiced medicine at a government hospital in Kabul, but after a few months was forced to flee for her safety to her native Jaghori, where she provided medical treatment to patients throughout the remote areas of Central Afghanistan. In 1984, she fled to Pakistan. After working as a doctor at the refugee branch of the Mission Hospital and distressed by the total lack of health care facilities for Afghan refugee women, she started a hospital for Afghan refugee women and children in Quetta.

In 1989, she established the Shuhada Organization and Shuhada Clinic. The Shuhada Organization operates 12 clinics and 4 hospitals in Afghanistan and Pakistan, all dedicated to the provision of health care to Afghan women and girls. These health facilities provide services in Bamiyan, Ghazni, Ghor, Wardak, and Kabul provinces, and in Quetta. In addition, the Shuhada Organization runs nurse, community health worker and traditional birth attendant training programs and reproductive health education projects. The

organization opened a Science Institute in Pakistan in 2001 to train young women and men as physician assistants, science teachers, and emergency medical technicians.

Samar also has been a leader for education for Afghan women and girls. The Shuhada Organization operates and 71 schools for girls and boys in Afghanistan and three schools for Afghan refugees in Quetta, Pakistan; the schools educate 48,000 girls and boys. During the Taliban regime, Shuhada's schools in Central Afghanistan were among the few academic girls' primary schools; the organization's girls' high schools were the only high schools that girls were able to attend in the country. The Shuhada Organization also ran underground home school classes for girls in Kabul. In addition, the Shuhada Organization runs English and computer courses, income generation, and adult literacy programs for women in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Shuhada Organization also has established the first and only shelter for vulnerable women in Afghanistan. The shelter provides a safe living and learning environment for women who have no guardians, are at risk for violence, are poor, and are not able to earn a living. The goal is to provide these women and their children not only with shelter and food, but also with opportunities for education and training so that they can have better lives and eventually be able to support themselves.

Numerous international human rights and women's rights organizations have recognized Samar for her leadership on behalf of women. Her awards and honors include the 1994 Community Leadership Award from Roman Magsaysay Award Foundation in the Philippines; 1995 Global Leader for Tomorrow from World Economic Forum in Switzerland, 1998 100 Heroines Award in the United States; Paul Grunninger Human Rights Award, Paul Grunninger Foundation, Switzerland March 2001; Voices of Courage Award, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York, June 2001; John Humphrey Freedom Award, Rights and Democracy, Canada December 2001; Ms. Magazine, Women of the Year on behalf of Afghan Women, USA December 2001; Women of the Month, Toronto, Canada, December 2001; Best Social Worker Award, Mailo Trust Foundation, Quetta, Pakistan March 2001; International Human Rights Award, International Human Rights Law Group, Washington, DC April 2002; Freedom Award, Women's Association for Freedom and Democracy, Barcelona July 2002; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, New York October 2002; Perdita Huston Human Rights Award, Washington, D.C., June 2003; Profile in Courage Award, Boston, May 2004; Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights, Washington, D.C., June 2004, and the Paul Schiller Stiftung Award, Switzerland, October 2004. In November 2004, Samar was awarded and honorary doctorate of law from the University of Alberta, Canada. She was awarded a honorary doctorate in humanities from Brown University in May 2005.

Samar was born in Jaghori, Afghanistan, on 4 February 1957.