

Theatre Tackles Election Fraud in Afghanistan

Afghan Theatre Troupes Conduct Mobile Performances on Voter Rights and Election Fraud Prevention Leading up to the 2014 Presidential Election

New York, NY, July 10, 2013 - [Bond Street Theatre](#) (BST) returns to Afghanistan this month to train six Afghan theatre troupes to spread crucial information about voting rights and election fraud to communities across Afghanistan in preparation for the 2014 presidential election, focusing on areas of highest illiteracy (90% for women, 63% for men, UN Report). Three all-female troupes will reach all-female audiences. The project is supported by the [United States Institute for Peace](#).



White Star Company performs in Kabul, 2011.

On July 15, three BST actor-educators begin work with the directors of six professional theatre troupes in Afghanistan as part of the **Fraud Mitigation: Educating the Electorate** project. BST will collaborate with the directors in preparing performances that address the importance of fair and free elections, and develop a replicable workshop program that trains youth in civic rights and leadership skills.

The six troupes will present **70+ performances** in multiple provinces between August 2013 and April 2014. Elections are scheduled for April 5, 2014. Performances are followed by interactive activities with the audience to explore potential solutions to voting issues. The goal of the project is to use interactive, mobile theatre performances to educate the electorate on the value of a strong, legitimate government achieved by a fair election

process and effective fraud prevention strategies.

Election Fraud and Voter Issues

Afghanistan's 2009-2010 election was marred by fraud and corruption, causing many Afghans to lose faith in the Kabul government. In 2011, **only 40%** said they planned to vote in the 2014 presidential election (Democracy International). Many citizens are unaware of voting rights and procedures and do not recognize fraud, especially in rural communities and among youth and women.

Theatre is an effective means to present critical information in an entertaining, interactive format. USIP Senior Grants Program Officer **Barmak Pazhwak** said, "*As Afghanistan faces a political transition in the form of the 2014 presidential elections -- for the first time in its troubled history, it is of highest importance to ensure voter participants in a credible election process. USIP supports Bond Street Theatre's innovative efforts to educate local voters in fraud mitigation strategies and strengthen their capacity to effectively promote a transparent electoral*

process."

Bond Street Theatre has been working toward peace and social improvement in Afghanistan since 2002 through programs that build the capacity of local organizations and promote creative thinking and problem-solving, especially focusing on women and youth. The Election Fraud Mitigation project builds on BST's 2010-2012 Theatre for Social Development program, which provided artistic and practical business training to prepare local theatre groups to use their skills for public education.

The Afghan theatre companies will be working closely with the **Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC)**, responsible for administering and supervising elections and referenda, the **Free & Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA)**, working to promote election transparency, the **United States Institute for Peace**, and international election monitors.



Maiwand Company performs in Kandahar, 2012.

The election organizations will provide up-to-date information to inform the play scripts, while the theatre groups will report updated information from the field. The mutual efforts and ongoing dialogue between the artists and officials will assist in ensuring a fair election.

In coordination with the performance series, the Election Fraud Project features workshops for youth in leadership and communication skills to prepare students to be critical thinkers and active members of society, and encourage youth involvement in current events. Educators receive the **BST Training Manual**, developed to teach aid organizations theatre-based development tools.

The Election Fraud Mitigation program is funded by the [United States Institute for Peace](#), an organization promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan since 2002 and working toward peaceful dispute resolution, peace education, and promotion of rule of law.

[Bond Street Theatre](#), active in Afghanistan since 2002, stands out amidst the country's most committed cultural ambassadors. Founded in 1978, the company is dedicated to peacebuilding, empowerment, and healing in areas of conflict and poverty worldwide.

For further information or to schedule an interview, please contact [Olivia Harris](#) at 212-254-4614 or [Joanna Sherman](#). In Afghanistan, call +93 (0) 796 188 612.

Artistic Director: Joanna Sherman
Managing Director: Michael McGuigan
Communications Director: Olivia Harris

**Bond Street Theatre -- 2 Bond Street,
New York, NY 10012 USA
212-254-4614 tel -- 212-460-9378 fax
info@bondst.org
www.bondst.org**



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION and STORIES:

[Bond Street on the Road](#) blog
[Artistic-Humanitarian Relief](#) work
[American Theatre](#) article about Burma: "Can Laughter Set You Free?" by Michael McGuigan
[Video: Theatre project: Herat, Afghanistan](#)
[Video: Theatre project with women in Haiti](#)
[Video: Theatre collaboration in Burma](#)
[Video: Beyond the Mirror : NYC performance](#)