

## CASS MENTOR PROGRAM

The Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS), a program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Georgetown University's Center for Intercultural Development (CIED), provides a means of reaching and uplifting socioeconomically disadvantaged but talented people from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean as well as increasing the number of current and future leaders of these nations with a positive learning experience in the United States. Twenty young women are studying small and business entrepreneurship and are developing projects to improve the lives of their fellow citizens when they return home. AAUW Rockland will help the students to focus and right size these projects and develop the personal habits, skills and informal education needed to implement them as well as learn skills to survive in the American culture. This involvement achieves the branch goals of:

- Increasing visibility
- Sharing the mission through relevant mission-based programming

Two branch members met with the CASS director to determine how we could benefit each other. A steering committee was developed to brainstorm possibilities. Every possible opportunity to interrelate the membership with the young women was utilized. A calendar of events was developed as well as a manual for mentors. Solicitations for participants were sent out to members and friends, culminating in a mentoring open-house as part of the International Women's Day observance. To date 6 new members have joined as a result of the program. The major African American sororities joined in the Diversity Brunch at which the students performed native songs and dances. Forty seven members and 14 non members are involved in planning and implementing the program. The association of the students and AAUW were shared with the public at Great Decisions, a branch meeting on female images in the media, the Diversity Brunch, a trip to the UN's CTAUN meeting, January 30, 2009 to meet Greg Mortensen, and International Women's Day.

As a result of this collaboration, there is a great interaction between the many cultures in Rockland County, AAUW and other communities. AAUW has had to develop greater sensitivity to diversity in terms of cultural assumptions, language and philosophy.

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## **International Women's Day – March 7<sup>th</sup> from 1-3pm**

Join us at the Ellipse at Rockland Community College to celebrate International Women's Day. The program starts with a special presentation from Catherine Moore, former IFUW international representative, who will update the Rockland Branch on the current situation regarding women's rights in the global arena. A lively question and answer period will follow.

Don't miss the ***CASS Mentor program kick-off*** that will follow the presentation. Get involved and inspire one (or all) of the twenty young scholars who are studying in the US for two years. For more information please contact Mimi Korb at 845-357-4043 or Helena Maxwell at

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## **Rockland AAUW Field Trip to the United Nations!**

On Friday, January 30, 2009, thirty members of AAUW Rockland attended the Committee on Teaching About the United Nations (CTAUN) presentation on *Protecting Human Rights: The United Nations, Our Schools*. There were many distinguished speakers that spoke about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its ratification and the responsibilities of all members of the human race to uphold the rights for all peoples.

“The light is fading”, according to Craig Mokhiber, the Deputy Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. His view is that the “idea” of human rights is under assault. There is a common, growing thought that there are things that “trump” human rights such as state security, national borders and global markets. To counter this, a mobilization of ALL people is needed. This cannot be solved by NGOs, the UN or governments alone.

Other panel members answered pressing questions about the United States involvement, or lack thereof. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations recounted how the United States and eight other nations have not yet ratified CEDAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. While the United States was active in designing this treaty, it has been reluctant to sign on because it would have to uphold all elements of the treaty. Despite the previous administrations hesitancy, Senator Joe Biden was an active supporter of CEDAW ratification. The panel was hopeful that Vice President Joe Biden and the new administration will ratify CEDAW shortly.

Shulamith Koenig, President, The People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning, spoke passionately about basic human rights. She asks in her seminars two questions: When was the first time your human rights were violated? And when was the last time your human rights were respected? Shula stressed “Dignity not charity” when providing for other’s rights.

During a video conference with students from Canada, Cameroon and Pakistan, a question was asked as to how to respect customs and religious beliefs while upholding human rights. The most frank answer came from the Ambassador of Bangladesh who was in the audience. His opinion is that he “cannot defend anything on the basis of culture or history that violates human rights”.

The keynote speaker, Greg Mortensen, author of *Three Cups of Tea* gave an inspirational slide show on his schools in Central Asia, the Pennies for Peace program whereby children collect pennies for other children and of his peace building efforts. *Three Cups of Tea* is now required reading for the State Department. Greg Mortensen has seen a tremendous increase in the number of children being educated in Afghanistan. This is promising, according to Greg, "because this war will not be won with bombs but with books".