

Lauryn Oates

Friday Keynote Speaker



Lauryn Oates is a Canadian human rights activist whose work concentrates on international development, gender equity, and education in conflict zones. She has worked throughout the Muslim world and holds particular expertise on Afghanistan, as an advocate for women's rights there since 1996. She is a fierce proponent of internationalism, the universalism of human rights, and frequently speaks out against cultural relativism.

She is the founder of the Vancouver (1999) and Montreal (2001) Chapters of the non-profit solidarity network, Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and is currently their Project Director, managing their Excel-erate Teacher Training Program among other projects. She managed the CIDA-funded Women's Rights in Afghanistan Fund and other projects supporting women's movements and peacebuilding in the Middle East and Central Asia from 2002-2006 at the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. In 2004 she conceived Ideaccess, which translated and distributed human rights and women's rights resources into Arabic, Farsi and other languages free of charge in the Middle East and Central Asia. In 2006 Ideaccess was a finalist in the Stockholm Challenge, receiving honourable mention at the Nobel Hall in Stockholm. She is a founding member of the Canada Afghanistan Solidarity Committee and Coordinator of the Funders' Network for Afghan Women.

Lauryn holds a BA Honours in International Development Studies from McGill University, an MA in Human Security and Peacebuilding from Royal Roads University, and is a PhD candidate in Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. Her graduate thesis research was concerned with the links between access to information, language and the agency of civil society in the Middle East and Central Asia, and her current doctoral research is focused on the development of mother tongue teaching resources using information communications technologies (ICT) for primary teachers in northern Uganda.

She is the recipient of several awards and distinctions, including the 2000 Chatelaine Women of the Year, the 2001 National Post/L'Oréal Canada Women of Influence, and a YTV Achievement Awards finalist for Public Service. In 2008, The Globe & Mail named her as the first of Ten Canadians to Watch in 2009. She lives on Bowen Island, BC.