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**AYUSA International Announces New Program to Advance Educational**

**Exchange for Students from the Middle East and North Africa**

*Department of State Backs Unprecedented Youth Exchange Initiative*

**SAN FRANCISCO, California**—AYUSA International announced that it has been awarded a \$2.85 million grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, to bring youth from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend one academic year in the United States. The Partnership for Learning Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program—one of the most ambitious global exchange initiatives in U.S. history—seeks to create a dialogue and personal bridges of understanding among successor generations in the U.S. and the Muslim world.

“My highest priority as Assistant Secretary is to engage more—not less—with the world,” said Patricia Harrison, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). “We intend to ensure our programs are a force for positive change and that they reach wider audiences, especially our youth.”

As the prime recipient for this grant, AYUSA leads the efforts of a consortium of organizations committed to serving the YES scholarship students. AYUSA’s consortium partners include AMIDEAST, ASSE, iEARN, and Sister Cities International. Students participating in the YES exchange will be competitively selected from Gaza, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank, and Yemen.

Beginning in August, 2003, YES scholarship recipients will live with host families, attend local high schools, learn about civics and American values, acquire leadership skills, participate in community service and volunteerism, and help educate Americans about their countries and cultures. As with all AYUSA programs, YES is designed to help international youth learn to appreciate diversity and address societal problems in a pluralistic society. Upon their return, students will apply their experience to make a difference in reducing misunderstandings between countries.

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“One of the great contributions of the United States in the last century has been the promotion of person to person exchanges so that future leaders can witness first hand the strength of U.S. institutions and the goodness of the American people,” said Craig Brown, Vice President, Corporate Development at AYUSA. “The Department of State has created the YES program at this critical time as an historic opportunity to bring together promising youth from the Muslim world with their American peers in the confidence that they will learn from one another, discover their common aspirations, and sew the seeds for a more peaceful world and secure future.”

AYUSA’s partners overseas, AMIDEAST and iEARN, are conducting a merit-based student selection with an emphasis on recruiting promising youth from diverse socio-economic populations. Special AYUSA orientation programs designed for YES students, host families, and schools will provide tools and understanding in working with youth from these specific regions.

As a leader in the field of academic youth exchange for decades, AYUSA has responded to government-endorsed initiatives that provide scholarship opportunities for students from diverse communities around the world. In addition to the YES Program, AYUSA administers four significant Department of State grants providing exchange opportunities for students from communities ranging from Serbia to Kyrgyzstan. More complete information about AYUSA International is available at <http://www.ayusa.org>.

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*AYUSA International is a nonprofit 501.c.3 educational and cultural exchange organization headquartered in San Francisco, California. AYUSA promotes global learning and leadership by offering a unique, richly personal experience for students, volunteer families, host high schools and local communities. AYUSA reaches across interpersonal and international borders, celebrating worldwide community through the spirit, character and promise of our youth.*