

Phi Beta Kappa Society Publication

"Working in a conflict zone requires the flexibility to adapt to the local environment while remaining true to your organization's mission and goals. It comes back to the integrity that Phi Beta Kappa encourages. You have to focus on long-term goals, be willing to take the more arduous path when necessary to achieve sustainable results. The easiest path forward is not always the best path in terms of long-term results." – Silbi Kelly Stainton



Silbi Kelly Stainton is founder and president of the Marshall Direct Fund, a woman-led nonprofit working to alleviate poverty and illiteracy via sustainable education and economic development in Pakistan with a special focus on women and girls. Marshall Direct Fund derives its name from the historic Marshall Plan. Just as George Marshall recognized the great need to invest in war-weary people and ventures abroad, the Marshall Direct Fund now has the very same opportunity to invest in people who are in desperate need of educational and economic opportunities so that they too can choose peace and prosperity over violence and despair. Investing in education and economic development in Pakistan provides benefits not only for Pakistan, but also to the world at large as it helps eliminate the fertile ground from which extremists now recruit.

The need to invest in education and economic development in Pakistan became clear to Stainton during her master's degree program at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy where she studied international security focusing on terrorism and asymmetric threats in the Middle East and southwest Asia. She jointly studied at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Her master's thesis, which began prior to 9/11, focused on the U.S. management of the war on terror. Disappointed by her observation that the U.S. government failed to fully utilize the different tools available to effectively counter the extremist threat, Stainton decided to do something in 2007 and thus launched Marshall Direct Fund.

Stainton holds a B.A. from the University of Colorado where she majored in international affairs, focusing on counter-terrorism, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude in 1998. Her experience also includes recent volunteer work and a fellowship with the Aspen Institute, a position in business development for Bechtel Corporation and several other involvements in local charitable causes. Stainton is mother to two small children.

"Working in an international environment is challenging and requires a number of skills that a liberal arts education provides," Stainton said.

"The ability to think critically and find solutions to complex problems in an innovative way is perhaps the most important benefit, while another major advantage of a liberal arts education is the knowledge and capacity to understand, respect and work with people from other cultures," she observed.

"The poor in Pakistan understand their challenges better than anyone. They must and can be the architects of the solutions to the problems they face. Marshall Direct Fund simply facilitates their capacity to deliver these solutions."