

# A common ground

## Nonprofit creates ties with women in Uzbekistan

By **Ryan Carter** Staff Writer

PASADENA — Four leaders of Central Asia's nonprofit world got a taste of life at an American nonprofit Tuesday.

Turns out life at nonprofits in Uzbekistan and the U.S. are a lot alike.

In both countries, nonprofits struggle for fundraising. They both are trying to help people get employed or trained in a variety of skills. Much of the time, they are run by women and help women, and are always looking for ways to get their message out.

So the job-resource center Women at Work in Pasadena was common ground for the Uzbek women — Gulnora Yusupova, Jamila Abdullaeva, Albina Belevich and Saida Turakulova — as they met with officials from the Pasadena nonprofit.

They were in the U.S. through the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program to learn about everything from the American women's movement to nonprofits.

"Nonprofits are not only important in our country ... it's an important sector for any country," said Abdullaeva, director and attorney for Primus Inter Pares Law Co. with NGO Liabilities.

Although their country has been somewhat insulated from the world's economic meltdown — including the problems of its neighbors in Central Asia — Uzbek nonprofits educate a populace of 110 nationalities about everything from iodine shortages to protection of the environment. They help develop small business and work to train people for work, they said.



Walt Mancini Staff Photographer

Women at Work, a nonprofit job-training center in Pasadena, invited four women from Uzbekistan to discuss nonprofits and women's issues. From left are Gulnora Yusupova; Robin McCarthy, the executive director of Women at Work; Albina Belevich; Saida Turakulova and Jamila Abdullaeva.

That connected with Women at Work Executive Director Robin McCarthy, whose organization serves about 5,000 women a year, offering such programs as job networking and computer training.

"Our focus is on getting women back into the workplace," McCarthy told her guests. "Many of them are recently divorced, widowed, or left alone with children."

That was a familiar story to the Uzbek women.

"We often deal with women facing some serious challenges in their lives, like being divorced or widowed," Abdullaeva said.

Getting those women — and teenagers — trained and retrained for the work force is a key chal-

lenge for both societies, the women agreed.

But there were some contrasts.

In their weeklong trip across the country, the Uzbek women noted that the social protection network in their country is cast wider than here.

For instance, Belevich noted that maternity leave in her country is up to three years, with a year of salary.

Still, a "wow" came from one of the women — who spoke through interpreters Anna Richardson and Igor Leybzon — when McCarthy told them that unemployment benefits last up to 90 weeks in the United States.

ryan.carter@sgvn.com  
(626) 962-8811, ext. 2720