

Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller

Remarks at the Local Government Best Practices Conference

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Ala-Archa Government Residence

I am pleased to be here today to celebrate your accomplishments and to thank you for your hard work and dedication in our mutual goal of decentralization and local self-government. 2008 marked 10 years of partnership between the American people and the government of Kyrgyzstan in the area of decentralization and local self-government. The road was not always easy, but together, hand-in-hand, we have achieved great progress and we look forward to continuing our partnership.

The success of local self-government – your success – includes several rounds of city, *okrug*, and *ayil okmotu* elections that have taken place in Kyrgyzstan, giving citizens more of a voice in local government. The Government of Kyrgyzstan has also decentralized its fiscal systems, giving local governments more independent and predictable budgets.

Many of you here in this room helped your municipality thrive by coming up with creative ways to increase tax payments and earn revenue from municipal property. As a result, you have improved schools, streets, and other infrastructure for your grateful constituents. I was pleased to learn that several local self-governments have focused their efforts on increasing investment and creating businesses and jobs. I am also proud that USAID has been a reliable partner for a decade in improving Kyrgyz local self-government including assistance in developing the legal framework for decentralization; bringing in experience from other countries such as Poland, Serbia, and Latvia; facilitating competitions between local governments; and supporting the exchange of experience among local governments inside the country and with other countries as well as material assistance in the form of grants to local communities that has been provided by the American people through USAID. These grants have enabled local self-government bodies to repair schools, kindergartens, public health clinics, and purchase equipment for better water systems, improving the lives of local residents.

You truly understand that good governance starts at the local level, and I am proud of your accomplishments. I am excited to hear the creative ideas you have to share and to hear all the ways you are improving the lives of your constituents. Thank you for your dedication, and I look forward to continuing our partnership to improve lives, provide better services, and promote economic development in local municipalities.

Thank you