



# BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Mobilizing Youth to Tackle Injustice in Afghanistan

Bond Street Theatre promotes public dialogue on rule of law and access to justice in Afghanistan with US Institute of Peace support

NEW YORK, NY - October 2016 - Bond Street Theatre (BST) is initiating a program to inform and engage communities in Afghanistan around legal rights and access to justice through informative mobile theatre performances, media events, workshops, and other awareness-raising strategies that will include local police, justice officials and religious leaders. BST has been conducting programs in Afghanistan since 2003 on human rights, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and voter education with [US Institute of Peace](#) support.

Efforts to build a consistent nationwide justice system in Afghanistan have been hindered by the lack of accurate information about formal legal rights and processes versus customary justice practices. Much of the country relies on traditional councils for dispute resolution with results that are often arbitrary, driven by personal relationships, discriminatory and with little consistency in sentencing.

According to the United States Institute of Peace, which is sponsoring the program and has been active in Afghanistan since 2002, up to [80% of legal disputes](#) are resolved outside of the formal justice system. The failure of state legal institutions to respect and promote the rule of law and accountability has been a major cause of instability and conflict in the country.

The challenge for Bond Street Theatre is to promote justice sector reform while respecting local traditions and perspectives. Citizens need a clearer understanding of their rights under official government law in relation to the variables of customary law, and education regarding effective ways to secure justice in communities that are far removed from the National government in Kabul.

To meet that challenge, BST is building on its recent *Creativity in Action* program, which has trained 400 youth across the country, male and female, to design and implement practical community improvement projects. The project has motivated scores of youth to tackle issues that have stymied local governments, and inspired local officials to join them in improving community conditions.

Building on the enthusiasm and success of these Provincial Youth Leaders, BST is giving them a new task: to use their leadership and communication skills, honed through BST's practical theatre-based workshops, to disseminate information about rule of law and access to justice in their own communities across Afghanistan.

Youth groups from eight provinces will receive intensive training in Kabul in legal systems and justice issues, plus theatre and media training so they can disseminate this information in their communities in attractive and engaging ways. In addition, BST's all-women's theatre groups will reach women who are often isolated by tradition and location.

One special feature of the mobile theatre performances is an interactive component, which allows audience members to join the actors on stage to role-play alternate solutions to the issues presented in the play. This participation stimulates community dialogue and offers ownership of the solutions.

Equally essential, by engaging local government and religious leaders in the project, the Youth Leaders will find collaborative pathways to shift and transform deeply entrenched judicial systems.

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