The tragic events of September 11 have had a profound effect on the citizens of a free nation. Displays of patriotism have changed the landscape of our homes and neighborhoods, yet polls indicate many Americans are willing to accept more restrictions placed on their civil liberties. On the other side of the globe, the citizens of new democracies crave the very freedoms we seem so willing to give up. Preparing youth for effective citizenship has begun to flourish in classrooms around the world, and the Arizona Bar Foundation is taking a leading role in this effort.

In January, the Bar Foundation Board of Directors agreed to serve as the primary organization to oversee the ongoing development of the Civitas International Civic Education Exchange Program “Education for Democracy” in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy Office of Public Affairs, is providing federal funding for the Civitas International Program for the next five years. In March, the Arizona Bar Foundation received its first grant award in the amount of $300,000 to administer the Bosnia program.

The Civitas Program was initiated in 1996 and is currently being implemented in nine countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, part of the former country of Yugoslavia. Since 1996, more than 8,000 teachers from all three ethnic groups (Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats) have been trained to teach the basic concepts necessary to support a democratic society. They use a newly created curriculum that addresses citizenship, the Constitution, rights and responsibilities of citizens, and human rights.

In addition to the new curriculum, last year 24,000 elementary and high school students participated in “Project Citizen” competitions, in which groups of students analyzed, developed and presented solutions to public issues and problems. For instance, one group of students tackled the problem of the state of the environment following the three-year war in Bosnia.

Lynda Rando, the Bar Foundation’s Director of Law-Related Education Programs, will provide the ongoing administration and supervision of the Bosnian Civitas program on behalf of the Foundation. In February, Lynda Rando and Professor Nancy S. Haas of Arizona State University’s College of Education traveled to Sarajevo to work with the international staff and faculty from universities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. These Bosnian and Arizona administrators, with a group of professors and their assistants, are pilot-testing the new democracy curriculum in their respective universities.

As of this writing, I expect to accompany a congressional staff delegation on an April trip to Bosnia. We will meet teachers and students from all three ethnic groups and observe the new curriculum being used in the classroom. Clearly, the Arizona Bar Foundation is on the right track in promoting “Education for Democracy” in Arizona and within the international community.

As lawyers, we appreciate and value the democratic ideals on which our country was founded. We need to ensure that citizens of newly emerging nations appreciate their new roles and responsibilities to protect and safeguard the constitution and human rights in their democratic communities.

We will give you additional updates on the Civitas program in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the ensuing months. If you are interested in learning more about the program in Bosnia—and the role of the Arizona Bar Foundation—contact Lynda.Rando@staff.azbar.org.