

PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC BATHHOUSE TRADITION REHABILITATED

June 21, 2004 Jalalabad – Afghan community bathhouses will soon be operational again in a new UNDP public health project. The construction of the first in a series of bathhouses, or hammams, was inaugurated today in Jalalabad by the Deputy Minister of Urban Development and Housing, Dr. Qiamuddin Djalalzada. The Ministry, in collaboration with UNDP and with funding from the European Commission, plans to construct or rehabilitate the hammams in five provincial cities (Herat, Mazar e Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Ghazni) over the next three months.

The European Commission has provided UNDP with two million euros to work with the communities and the Ministry in planning and constructing the hammams. In a move toward developing the capacity of the Government to manage and implement projects on its own, UNDP is establishing working groups in each urban district, giving the communities and the Ministry a forum to collaborate on decision-making.

Hammams have been a traditional place for Afghans to bathe for centuries, but they have also served as an informal gathering place for community women. They have suffered deterioration and neglect over the years, particularly under the Taliban, when women were prohibited from using them and the number of health complaints rose significantly.

“The rehabilitation of the hammams will improve public health in Afghanistan, providing thousands with bathing facilities and hot water,” says Ercan Murat, UNDP’s Country Director.

The hammam project is part of UNDP’s Recovery and Employment in Afghanistan Programme (REAP), an employment-generating programme that has created more than 1.7 million man-days of work for 30,000 workers in Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar. The hammam project will employ hundreds of workers in constructing and rehabilitating the bathhouses, improving the drainage systems and teaching health awareness to the community.

“The hammams are very important for the health of the Afghan people, and this project is exciting for the city of Jalalabad,” says Abdul Raziq Arsalyee, the Mayor of Jalalabad. The city of Jalalabad also agreed to provide additional resources to support the sustainability of the project and to supplement the services provided at each hammam.

The next inauguration will take place in Mazar on Thursday 28th of June.

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