

PRESS RELEASE

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2005 GMA Winners Selected

Kabul, November 20, 2005 - Winners of the Afghan 2005 International Micro-entrepreneurship Awards were selected in Kabul on Saturday, November 19, 2005 at a ceremony attended by Waheedullah Shahrani, Advisor to the President and the Deputy Finance Minister, with men and women sharing the prizes of the six equal categories.

The competition for the awards, which were distributed as part of the activities organized under the 2005 International year of Microfinance, was organized with the cooperation of a number of international and national organizations: UN Capital Development Fund provided the funding, which was managed by the UNDP, and Afghanistan Microfinance Association and MISFA (Microfinance Investment Support Fund for Afghanistan) coordinated the activities.

The awards were given in six categories which were: Agricultural Business, Businesses outside Kabul, Widows of the Conflict, Demobilized Soldiers, Returned Refugees and Alternative Livelihoods.

The winners are Abdul Majid and Sumia in the Agricultural Business category, Shaima and Zainab Berat in the category of Businesses outside Kabul, Sughra and Khadeeja in the category of Widows of the Conflict, Abdul Muhammad and Muhammad Nasim in the category of Demobilized Soldiers, in the Returned Refugees category Shah Jahan Reaza and Nasrin Dost Muhammadi, and finally in Alternative Livelihoods category Abdul Hamid Alam Khan and Gulbaz Khan.

The awards, \$500 each to the first prize winners and \$300 each to the second prize winners, and the certificates were presented to winners by Mr. Shahrani.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Anita Nirody, the Senior Deputy Country Director at the UNDP Country Office, said the hope inspired by the microcredit schemes for better living conditions appeared to have taken hold in Afghanistan. She expressed the hope that microfinance services could be made available to those who were not able to access them. The head of the Afghanistan Microfinance Association, Edward Greenwood says that microfinance was at a very exciting stage in Afghanistan and he hoped that similar organizations in the future would help raise awareness about the availability of microcredit schemes. Joyce Lehman of MISFA thanked the judges for their contribution in the process of selection of the winners.

"Life never been better"

Following the ceremony, interviewed by newsmen all winners expressed appreciation of the organization and thanked for the support.

Mohammed Naseem, (23), the second prize winner of the Demobilized Soldiers category said *"... the war is over and time has come for us to live in peace. A friend told me of this (microfinance) scheme and loans, which I borrowed to start over as a farmer. Life has never been any better."*

Ms Shaima (38), the winner of the first prize of the 'out of Kabul business' category, said *"My life has changed enormously. With my income, I can pay for my children's education and well-being. My respect has been restored in the society ..."*

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