

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme
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Youth Representatives from All Regions Gather to Support Peace and National Development Efforts

Kabul, 6 August: The National Youth Conference got off to a flying start with the participation of over 300 youth representatives from all the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The Conference was organized by the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Information and Culture, and supported by eight United Nations Agencies.

The three-day Conference is a part of the Afghanistan Joint National Joint Youth Programme (JNYP), led by the Ministry of Information and Culture, Office of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs, with the coordination support of UNDP. Other UN Agencies include UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, UNESCO, UNV, UNFPA, UNAMA and UNODC. Seven additional ministries are involved: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Justice.

Additional support for the Conference came from the United States Agency for International Development -- Afghanistan Livelihood Programme (ALP) for the eastern region, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), ARD, Flag International (FI), Bearing Point, with security provided by HART Security.

The meeting was addressed by the Vice President of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdul Karim Khalili, the Deputy Minister for Youth Affairs, Mr. Taimoor Shah Eshaq-zai, Ms. Anita Nirody, Country Director UNDP, and the Deputy Minister for Publication in the Ministry of Information and Culture, Mr. Din Mohammad Mobarez Rashedi.

Mr. Khalili specified the importance of youth rebuilding Afghanistan and drew attention to the fact that the youth in the country were born into and raised in the conflict situation. Mr. Khalili invited youth "to work together with the Government to establish a new society and correct the mistakes of the past".

Mr. Eshaq-zai noted that close to 70 per cent of the population of Afghanistan is under 25 years old. This segment of the population is generally disenfranchised, lacks education and employment opportunities, and rarely participates in decision-making at the community, provincial or national level. The situation of Afghan young women is of even more concern: early and forced marriages of women and incidents of self-immolation were on the rise. He said the youth had a big role to play in the social and political affairs of the nation. He informed the audience that Youth *Shuras* or councils had been established at the village,

district and youth level and 2,400 representatives from these *Shuras* would create the National Youth *Shura*.

Speaking on behalf of the United Nations in Afghanistan, the UNDP Country Director, Ms. Anita Nirody described the youth of Afghanistan as a vast resource of human capital with the potential to positively contribute towards development and reconciliation. She expressed the hope that the Conference would offer the youth an opportunity to share their aspirations for the future and contribute in a constructive way to development and peace in Afghanistan.

Ms. Nirody identified education and skills development, closer government-youth interface, and greater participation of young women and men in the country's socio-political process as critical issues to be discussed during the three-day Conference.

Emphasizing the importance of the Peace Day on 21 September, Ms. Nirody invited the youth to promote peace and raise awareness for peace and security in Afghanistan.

The Deputy Minister of Publications, Mr. Mobarez said the responsibility to focus strongly on developing the physical and mental potential of the young Afghan population did not rest with any specific Ministry. He dwelt on the need to inculcate interest in sports among young people. Citing the example of the recent victory of Iraq in the Asian Cup Soccer Finals, he said sports had the power to transcend narrow divides among people and unite a nation.

As part of the Joint National Youth Programme (JNYP) The Conference will provide youth, representing all provinces, the opportunities to share their ideas, hopes and visions for a more peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

Should you need further information on this press release or any other UNDP programme in Afghanistan, please contact Kumar Tiku, UNDP-Afghanistan Communications Officer, at kumar.tiku@undp.org

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