

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

Afghanistan Country Office, Shah Mahmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul



## Center for Policy and Human Development Celebrated the World Water Day

**Kabul, March 25, 2009**-- The UNDP Center for Policy and Human Development (CPHD) project, in order to raise awareness among the Afghan community regarding the importance of water, commemorated the World Water Day event at Kabul University. Among the guests were influential Afghan figures such as Finance Minister Dr. Omar Zakhailwal and the Chairman of the Institute of State Effectiveness, Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai.

This event was symbolic for two main reasons. First, it is the first time that World Water Day is celebrated in Afghanistan which provided a platform for addressing and dealing with the challenges of water. Second, it served as an introduction to the Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2009. The significance of clean drinking water, water for agricultural use, sanitation and water borne-diseases, water for energy and power and the challenges faced by local Afghan communities were the issues raised during the event.

World Water Day event was attended by more than 100 people; among them were students, lecturers, experts, local Maliks [*Leaders*] and high level guests including the Chancellor of Kabul University and two senior advisors to the President of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, President Karzai's message on the vital issue of water was delivered by the Chancellor of Kabul University. It was mentioned in the message that traditional methods in consumption of water for irrigation is a difficulty which leads to water waste and most of the times Afghan farmers face water scarcity. It was also mentioned that a number of Afghans in the rural areas suffer from various types of seasonal diseases which even end up to child mortality due to lack of access to clean drinking water.

Dr. Zakhailwal emphasized on the economic aspects of human security and water in his speech and Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai delivered a keynote speech by highlighting some of the main problems related to water facing the next generations of Afghans. Stressing on the points of the volume of water in the country, Dr. Ghani introduced a seven point strategy that could deal with water challenges in Afghanistan. He elaborated on climate change effects on water resources, investment in agriculture and its linkage to poppy cultivation and recommended preparing a policy to increase use of surface water to at least 30 per cent in the next five years for agriculture as a way to help reduce poppy cultivation and increase agricultural income. Meanwhile to increase use of water for energy production while proper planning for river systems and water management is needed and water rights should be determined and studied from legal perspectives. The local traditional water sharing systems needs to be reviewed when more focus is needed to increase job opportunities in water sector in the coming years.

Professor Mohammad Naeem Iqar, head of the geology department of Kabul University delivered a power-point presentation addressing climate change and its impact on Afghanistan's water resources and two prominent speakers, Sultan Mahmood Mahmoodi, Director General of Water Distribution in the Ministry of Energy and Water and a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Naseer Ahmad Fayez briefed the participants on their recommendations on water policy making.

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Hamidullah Amin, Chancellor of Kabul University closed the World Water Day event by noting the future role of the academic community in water research as well as extending great appreciation to CPHD for organizing the event.

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