NEWS

1. Elections framework signed
On 27 March the Afghanistan Parliamentary Elections project document was signed by the Chairman of the Interim Afghan Electoral Commission, Bismilla Bismil, Frederick Lyons, UNDP Country Director, and Filippo Grandi, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. The project document sets out the expected outcomes, activities and budget for the 18 September 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

2. Canadian commitment to UNDP programme
On 29 March the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and UNDP signed four funding agreements in support of the development process in Afghanistan. The Canadian contribution is in total amount of CAD15.7 million (almost USD13 million) and extends over the following programs and areas: 1) the National Area Based Programme for strengthening of the government capacity, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, and reducing poverty; 2) Two agreements in support of the Afghanistan New Beginning Programme for reintegration of former combatants and for an Ammunitions Survey and Transport and Destruction of Most Dangerous Weapons; 3) the Law and Order Trust Fund for capacity development and support of the Afghan police force.

3. Sector workshop attracts 500
On March 14-15 the first Afghan Investment Workshop was held in Kabul. The workshop was organized by the Afghan Investment Support Agency (AISA) and the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) in partnership with the UNDP Partnerships for Private Sector Development project. The event was attended by more than 500 local and international investors, governmental representatives and representatives of the donor community, providing the opportunity for public-private sector dialogue. Three key sectors were under discussion: Agro-business and agro-processing; Construction materials; Carpet manufacturing. More information and sector brochures on: www.afghanbusinesscentre.com.

4. Pleading for Afghanistan
On 25 March, four Afghan final-year law students from Kabul University arrived in Washington DC. Ms. Fakhria, Mr. Said Masood, Mr. Zemar Ahmad and Mr. Edrees Aliimi are participating in the prestigious "Philip C. Jessup Moot Court Competition", an annual contest organized by the International Law Students Association. The contest is a simulation of the International Court of Justice where applicants and respondents plead cases of international law. UNDP's Justice Programme is supporting and sponsoring their participation in the competition, as part of its legal education reform. On 23 March a ceremonial pleading was held by the four competitors at UNAMA. For the benefit of the nearly 100 persons who attended, the students simulated an ICJ jurisdiction court case involving maritime law. Just before
leaving Afghanistan, the students were honoured by Dr. Sarwar Danish, Minister of Justice of Afghanistan.

5. Accessibility is ability

17 March 2005, Kabul, Afghanistan: In order to make regular public services available for people with disabilities, a two-day workshop was held by UNDP through its National Program for Action on Disability. In conjunction with the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, and with the consulting expertise of Consulting Social of France, the workshop presented the findings of a field study on physical accessibility for disabled people of Afghanistan. The major points of the workshop included: methodology overview, development of a physical accessibility practical manual, and discussion on physical accessibility in Afghanistan. The next steps agreed at the workshop were: to establish a guideline for planning a barrier-free environment; to create tools for evaluating and monitoring of accessibility in building of Afghanistan; to develop capacity of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing for implementation of the Accessibility system in Afghanistan. For more information: Walid Wardak, wardak@disability.gov.af.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The UNDP Afghanistan family has a new web-site. The External Relations Unit would like to thank the whole team for its support. We hope that with your assistance we’ll have a modern looking, useful and efficient communication tool. Please send your recommendations, notes, ideas and praises to: Ikram Afzali, ikram.afzali@undp.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Afghanistan Development Forum

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan will host the third annual Afghanistan Development Forum (ADF) from 4-6 April. The theme of the Forum is “Accelerating economic development”. The Government will present a strategy to enhance economic growth and to improve domestic revenue collection for the 1384 (2005/2006) National Budget. The Government of Afghanistan will also illustrate a plan for counter-narcotics.

Unlike previous years, this year’s forum will not be a pledging conference or a comprehensive presentation of each ministry’s needs and priorities. Rather, it is planned as a substantive discussion between Afghan and senior international policy makers on Afghanistan’s development priorities and the key challenges to accelerating Afghanistan’s reconstruction. More information: www.adf.gov.af.

PPSD - launch of Market Sector Assessment Report

On 14 April the UNDP Partnerships for Private Sector Development project will launch a Market Sector Assessments report covering: spices; low added-value consumer goods; poultry; construction (both services related to construction and construction materials); cashmere; wheat-based food products; gem cutting and polishing. The sectors covered in this report offer particular opportunities for domestic small and medium sized enterprise development and there is little other information readily available about them. One can download sector factsheets on www.afghanbusinesscentre.com. The full report will be available from 15 April.

To make a submission to the next newsletter, please e-mail gary.holub@undp.org.