NEWS

CIDA – UNDP Human Rights Treaty Reporting project

June 19 2005: The Human Rights Treaty Reporting Agreement between CIDA and UNDP was signed on Sunday 19 June by Christopher Alexander, Ambassador of Canada in Afghanistan and Karen Jorgensen, UNDP Deputy Country Director. Mr. Ghulam Shams from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Richard Bennett from UNAMA were also present.

Through the signing of this agreement, CIDA showed its desire to support the Human Rights Treaty Reporting with a contribution of CN$ 375,000.

The project aims to build sustainable capacities within the Government of Afghanistan for meeting its implementation and reporting obligations under international human rights treaties. Its main components include capacity-building of governmental staff and non-governmental stakeholders, the establishment of a database as a monitoring and controlling instrument and the creation of an institutional mechanism to participate in and support the reporting process.

First day of school for new parliamentary staff

11 June 2005: The SEAL project kicked into high-gear to mark the first day of classes for a new cadre of 120 parliamentary staff on June 11. These 120 people represent a newly recruited cadre of mid-level managers who will help drive the parliamentary machinery when the elected Members of Parliament take office in the fall.

They were thrust into an intensive six-week core training programme that will orientate them to the administrative work of parliament and develop their abilities. The training programme was developed by parliamentary expert trainers, supported by SEAL. It has been designed to develop very practical and pragmatic administrative and management skills, and introduces the participants to the basic rules common to all legislative assemblies.
Country Office staff retreat

June 11: UNDP’s Country Office team went on a day’s retreat to discuss the Global Staff Survey, and present the new Country Programme for 2006-2008. In addition, the retreat provided an informal opportunity for staff to get to know each other as well as show off their talents in the lunchtime talent show – an event that was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Pictures of the event are available for viewing in the main hallway of UNDP B. Digital copies can be ordered from Hamed Eqbal, hamed.eqbal@undp.org

Afghan Generic Medicines

July 5: Two cargo planes loaded with pharmaceutical machinery will arrive in Kabul on July 5. The medicine equipment will be installed in a new Afghan-owned and operated pharmaceutical factory named “Baz International Pharmaceutical Company Ltd”. Currently under construction, Baz Pharmaceuticals is expected to begin operations in the fall.

The “Afghan Generic Medicines Project” is a joint effort that brings together private and public partners interested in contributing to a healthier Afghanistan. The plant’s equipment and materials, as well as pharmaceutical expertise and training are being donated by the European Generic Medicines Association (EGA), the official body representing roughly 500 pharmaceutical companies from the generic medicines industry in Europe. UNDP is a partner in this project.

Presently, Afghanistan does not produce any pharmaceutically standardized medicines. While pharmacies are abundant throughout the country, very little standardization exists to monitor the quality of medicines being distributed to ailing patients, which gives rise to a significant concern over public health.

About 300 million to 400 million tablets of urgently needed medicines such as antibiotics and analgesics will be produced each year.

Last week, DDR staff went on a monitoring mission to Dara-e-Noor district where their vehicle unexpectedly broke down. Being in a place where there were no mechanics, this could have disastrous. But fortunately an ex-combatant who had been reintegrated and received vocational training in auto mechanics was found and repaired the vehicle for the team who were soon, very gratefully, on their way.
Donor update

June was a busy month for donor agreements. Below is listed all recent contributions:

Counter Narcotics Trust Fund
The Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) was established in May 2005 in cooperation with the Ministries of Finance and Counter Narcotics of the Government of Afghanistan. CNTF-funded activities will be part of the Government’s Core Development Budget and will be implemented under the authority of line ministries, even though they may be contracted out to external implementing partners. Since the establishment of the Trust Fund in May 2005, a number of governments have indicated interest, and UNDP has already concluded a Trust Fund agreement with the Government of Australia, which has contributed AUD 2 million to the Trust Fund.

Elections
Finland for National Assembly Elections (EUR 2M, signed 06/06)
CIDA for Elections (CAN 8M, signed 11/06)
EC for Elections (EUR 8.5M, signed 12/06)

SEAL
EC for SEAL (EUR 3M, signed 12/06)
France for SEAL (EUR 1M, signed 12/06)

ANBP
Switzerland for ANBP DDR (USD $500,000 signed 29/05)

Peace Aid Grant
Japan for “Regional Development for Sustainable Peace”, for USD $17 million (agreement to be signed July 6 – see ‘Announcements’ below.)

FEATURE

“My first bath in six years”

May 24, 2005: Water drips in a slow tip-tap into the red bucket on the white marble of a brand new public bathhouse in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, in Afghanistan, as the 40-year-old Mohammed Sarder, gently shampooing his four-year-old son, Azar, smiles and says “this my first bath in six years”.

Public bathhouses or hammams have served for hundreds of years for community hygiene as well as a public forum. The world-known Afghan mystic and philosopher, Rumi’s manuscript of Mathnawi contains repeated citings of hammam adventures, including the tale of a male masseuse serving in a female bathhouse in Rumi’s hometown, in Mazar-i-Sharif.

What makes this hammam special is that for many people, it is their first bath in six years. Public bathing was a crime under the Taliban regime thereby denying this important hygiene and social forum.
“It was a big problem”, says Mrs. Sakina Delgeer, a 45-year-old schoolteacher. “Hardly anyone could afford a warm and clean bath”, she recalls, adding that another factor was the drought (1998-2001) - the worst ever in living memory.

In 2003, UNDP initiated a project – with funds from the European Commission – to construct and rehabilitate 19 hammams in the major cities of Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, Kandahar in the south and Jalalabad in the east. This was, in fact, after the UNDP Project Implementation Unit had successfully delivered the rehabilitation of 30 public bathhouses in the capital, in Kabul, a year earlier.

The UNDP PIU Chief Engineer, Qudratullah Hamid says that lessons learnt during the first phase helped the joint team of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and the UNDP PIU to bring improvements during the design and construction of new hammams.

“The new hammams have been constructed based on traditional structures combined with new technologies that provide for better public health and sanitation”, said Hamid addressing the local media and press during the hammam inauguration in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Under the project agreement, the newly constructed hammams in Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad revert to the municipality, while one in each city becomes the property of the local council of women. The Chair of Mazar-i-Sharif Women’s Shura, Mrs. Sediqa Safi says her council will put the income, generated from the hammam revenue, to fund basic capacity-building and women empowerment projects. “Many women of our shura are unable to read and write. We will launch literacy courses for them as soon as the fund accumulates”, she adds.

Hammams are experiencing a major rebirth as thousands of men and women in Afghanistan, who lacked access to hot, clean, running water, return en masse to this traditional form of bathing.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Happy Birthday from the Secretary-General


In the name of the peoples of the United Nations, they pledged to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. …

They pledged to establish conditions under which justice and respect for law could be maintained. They promised to promote social progress, and better standards of life, in larger freedom.

Over sixty years, the United Nations has striven to redeem those pledges. We have had many successes. We have kept the peace in many places. We have helped banish smallpox and polio from almost every country. We have given millions of children an education that their parents could not dream of. We have helped organize elections, from Afghanistan to Burundi. And we have brought relief to victims of disasters like the Indian Ocean tsunami.

We have had failures. The worst, perhaps, was our collective failure to prevent the genocide in Rwanda.

Today, in a new century, we face new threats and challenges, but also new opportunities. Those “better standards of life in larger freedom” are now within our reach. To reach them, we must advance on all three fronts at once: development, security and human rights.

Never in the history of the United Nations have bold decisions been more necessary. And never have they been more possible.

This September, at the 2005 World Summit, leaders from 191 nations have the chance to make those decisions. With support, and encouragement from you, the peoples of the world, I believe they will.”
UPCOMING EVENTS

Afghanistan’s National Carpet Exhibition

The Ministry of Commerce and the Afghan Investment Support Agency (funded by UNDP) are organizing “Afghanistan’s National Carpet Exhibition” with the cooperation of the Kabul Carpet Association. The two-day exhibition, will take place on July 3-4 2005 at the Loya Jirga site in Kabul.

This event will showcase the best Afghan carpets, bringing together leading carpet manufacturers and producers from all over Afghanistan. The event will be launched on July 2, 2005 at 5pm by H.E. Hedayat Amin Arsala, Senior Advisor to the President and Minister of Commerce. The event will be attended by leading members of the Afghan Government, embassies, the private sector, NGOs and the international community.

This exhibition will demonstrate the quality and uniqueness of Afghan carpets, as well as promote and encourage further investment in this sector.

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Japanese strengthen their support

Only July 6, Japan will sign a $17 million multi-agency agreement with UNDP, UNMACA and FAO in a broad programmatic approach to achieving three objectives: 1) long-term macro economic development in the regions; 2) medium-term capacity development in the regions; and 3) immediate assistance to community development to enhance the reintegration of returnees as well as child and adult ex-combatants.

The project looks at “reintegration needs” from regional development lens. It will support the communities as a whole, instead of addressing returnees, ex-combatants or child soldiers separately. It intends to have a long term impact on regional development through supporting the government to produce “Regional Master-Plan.” At the same time, the proposal addresses the capacity development need of regional/provincial government which is the key to success of regional development. It also recognizes the immediate needs for the vulnerable population, including returnees and ex combatants. Without long-term perspective, the responses to mid-term and immediate needs will not be sustainable. On the other hand, lack of assistance to mid-term and immediate needs will not help achieve the long-term goal of regional development.

The entire Japanese contribution is $17 million of which $9.4 is to the UNDP, $4.5 to UNMACA and $3.8 to FAO. The agreement will be signed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 6.

NEW STAFF

Bob Boase (Canada) joins UNDP Civil Service Leadership Development (CSLD) project as Senior Technical Advisor. Over the last ten years Mr. Boase has worked with UNDP in Laos, Vietnam and China. He joins from Vietnam where he has been the Team Leader for an ADB Public Administrative Reform project.
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Marina Walter (Germany) joins UNDP Civil Service Leadership Development (CSLD) project as Project Manager. She has worked for six years with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and more recently with UNDPs Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in New York.
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