



UNDP Afghanistan Newsletter

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General Dustum Gives His Backing to the Disarmament Process

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2 One of the major figures that shaped Afghan politics throughout the years of fighting against Soviet occupation, the civil war and the rule of Taliban, General Dustum has given his full backing to the campaign of disarmament of former guerrillas conducted by the Afghan Government in cooperation with the UNDP.

4 Mr. Dustum was on hand on Thursday, Feb. 23 at a major ceremony in Shibergan, the capital of Jawzjan province, marking the surrender of hundreds of weapons and their ammunition to the control of the Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai.

6 He told journalists at the ceremony that he had arrived in the town two days earlier to discuss with the elders and his group commanders to advise them to support the DIAG⁺ process and give up their weapons.

A total of 385 weapons, in-

cluding mortars, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, were surrendered.

Overseeing the transfer of weapons to the government control was Yusuf Nooristan, First Deputy Defense Minister and Vice-chairman of the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission, at the head of a high level delegation from Kabul. Speaking to reporters,



Gen. Dustum talking to Journalists

self an ethnic Uzbek, and his guests were also hosted in that event.

A total of 385 weapons, including mortars, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, were surrendered.

The transfer of weapons by the group commanders who fought under Gen. Dustum followed an earlier mass transfer of weapons and ammunition to government in Paktya province on February 21. In that event in the provincial capital Gardez, five former Jihad commanders, Torab Khan, Sardar, Safihullah, Zahirullah and Zori Khan surrendered 15 tons of ammunition as well as dozens of light and heavy weapons to a DIAG weapons collection team.

he welcomed the support to the DIAG process by General Dustum.

Interestingly, the handover ceremony aimed at boosting peace and rule and law in Afghanistan coincided with another celebration, that of the anniversary of great medieval Uzbek poet Ali Sher Newai. General Dustum, him-

It was the second transfer of weapons to authorities in Gardez in less than a month, and it was attended by number of senior military and civilian officials as well as by UN and UNDP representatives.



Weapons surrendered by Gen. Dustum's commanders

Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) is supported by UK, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Denmark and Netherlands.

Brightened Employment Prospects for Graduates

The period of excitement and suspense has begun for 210 hopefuls in a newly introduced internship programme, initiated jointly by the Independent Administration Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) of the Afghan Government and UNDP, following the announcement of their success in the initial written test conducted at the beginning of February.

380 applicants took the test on February 4 in response to a widely publicized joint call by IARCSC and the UNDP, inviting new graduates to take up the opportunity of being recruited as interns to public service positions where they can both demonstrate their skills and enrich their experience so that they could compete for permanent employment in the future.

When the test papers were graded, 210 contestants were found to have provided adequate responses to the questions that would allow them to proceed to the next stage, that is the interview (or oral exam) process.

At the time of writing, many candidates, with slightly accelerated heartbeats and drops of sweat in the forehead, were waiting either to be interviewed or to be told of the results of their "oral exam".

In a country like Afghanistan, where employment reaches staggering proportions and putting food on the table is one struggle that one can not evade tussling, the importance of a chance of early employment, as offered by this project, can not be exaggerated.

Nevertheless, both IARCSC and the UNDP are well aware of the fact that, the value of this initiative is not limited to the job creation that it entails, but more importantly, the project is designed to foster the human capacity development for the public administration.

The best 100 among the 210 finalists will be identified in the first decade of March and depending on their areas of high education, they will be assigned to line ministries and other government agencies both to learn and to contribute to the work of those institutions.

Gender-balancing is very much in the mind of the recruiters: Half of the best 100 will have to be female.



Internship hopefuls sweating in the exam

Proud NUNV Happy with His Popularity

Samiullah Asad has already marked as one of the unforgettable moments of his life the day he was assigned as a National UNV in 2005.

He had just returned from Pakistan where he had lived for some 16 years as a refugee, an experience, while taking its toll on Samiullah, also helped him acquire some skills to share with his compatriots upon his return.

When he applied for the NUNV vacancy for an English Language instructor, he was recruited immediately, given his experience in Pakistan as an English language instructor since 1992.

Now he teaches English five

hours a day everyday to the staff of the Malalai Maternity Hospital (MMH), the biggest of its kind in Afghanistan.



Samiullah with his enthusiastic students

Regardless of the fact that the classes take place in a corridor of the hospital as there is no classroom, Samiullah is very happy with the enthusiasm and the active participation of his students in the process. He admits that at the

beginning he did have to face some restraint from his students because they are overwhelmingly female, but in time as the trainer-trainee relationship strengthened, the problems were easily overcome.

"I am well aware of the importance and values of Volunteerism and feel proud of my contribution in the capacity building of the MMH Staff" says Samiullah.

He believes he is conveying a significant message to Afghans, especially to the youth, that being part of the pool of volunteers, one does not only help the target beneficiaries, but also his/her personal development.

First National ICT Conference in Afghanistan



The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) project of United Nations Development Program (UNDP) aims to assist the Government of Afghanistan in its effort to narrow the digital divide with the rest of the world and enable the country to further benefit from ICT by becoming part of the global information society while preserving the country's cultural heritage.

Following the progress made under the UNDP/ICT Capacity Building Project (Phase I) and having taken into consideration the overall progress that have been made both through public and private sector efforts, ICT Capacity Building Project (Phase II) focuses on assisting the government in realizing its objectives central to the vision of the national ICT policy including enhancement of network, information and knowledge access and Government use of ICT with the aim to build a society fully benefiting from ICT.

After 3 years of development in Information and Communication Technologies in Afghanistan by the Public and Private sectors, it is now an opportune time to hold a National ICT Conference in Kabul to understand the degree of progress and spread of ICT in Afghanistan. The UNDP ICT Project and the Ministry of Communications are organizing the first National Information Communication Technology (ICT) Conference planned to be held in mid April 2006. The conference is a key step towards creating ICT awareness in Afghanistan on a national level and to provide information for high level government officials, private sector, representatives from the provinces, academicians and civil society on the status of ICTs in Afghanistan. The conference will provide a platform for creating synergies between the public sector, the private sector, donor agencies and other stakeholders to form cohesive ICT development targets and programs for

Afghanistan. H.E President Hamid Karzai, Ministers, members of the Afghan National Assembly, provincial governmental representatives and industry leaders from the private sector are expected to attend and contribute to the conference. The more exciting participation and input will be from the student body of various universities and the general public.

The National ICT conference will provide an opportunity to look at some of the leading development efforts in the field of ICTs in the country and opportunities for the public and private sectors to work together in Afghanistan. There will be a number of side conferences which will focus on expert skills development, Gender and ICT, ICT and Education, E-Governance and E-Commerce. Individuals interested in these particular areas will deepen the discussion in these areas and will provide recommendations on the way forward. In addition, an exhibition will also be held alongside the conference where major ICT related companies working in Afghanistan will be invited to exhibit their products and services. The conference is designed to be interactive to gather as much interest and input as possible. Conference findings and conclusions will be published in a conference proceedings document shortly thereafter.

The Ministry of Communications will elaborate on the ICT goals and achievement plan for Afghanistan. In addition, H.E Minister Sangin will talk about the relationship of ICTs MDGs and support of Afghanistan's development plans as articulated in I-ANDS for promoting growth, generating wealth and reducing poverty and vulnerability in Afghanistan.

Major donors, including USAID and World Bank are expected to attend the conference and elaborate on their involvements in ICT Develop-

ments in Afghanistan and their coordination with the government. UNDP will provide overviews on International best practices around the world focusing on E-Government to provide access to government services, accountability, transparency and delivery of services.

A key agenda in the conference will also be the launch of the .AF country code online registration. In addition, the formation of the National ICT Council of Afghanistan will be announced in the conference. The National ICT Council will be a coordinating body among all stakeholders of ICTs in Afghanistan through involvement of key government ministries, Civil Society Organizations and various private sector associations including such as Internet Service Provider's Associations, media associations and the GSM associations. Furthermore, the National Internet Registry Authority of Afghanistan (NIRA) and Afghanistan Computer Emergency Response Team (AFCERT) will also be introduced during the conference.

UNDP ICT Project is looking forward to holding this conference in the new atmosphere of growth and development in Afghanistan. All attempts will be made to well publicize the event and to get the maximum attendance from the public, which is where it counts and where ICT is intended to deliver its associated benefits.

Representatives from UN organizations, donor communities, embassies, academicians within Afghanistan are all invited to attend this conference. For more information, please contact:

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Afghanistan Contributes to Disability Convention

Employment rights of the people with disability will also be covered by the Convention.

“This sharing (of information) and interaction has put Afghan disability agenda on the global map; we learned a lot from our friends during these negotiations and meetings and the discussions have greatly enhanced our understanding of international disability policy and what other governments are doing about it” concluded Mr. Fahim, the Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, at the end of a trip to UN Headquarters to take part in the penultimate meeting on a new convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

The high level Afghan delegation that visited New York in January comprised, alongside

the Deputy Minister, S. Seraj, Advisor to the Minister, Rudy Rodriguez, Institutional Development Advisor at the Ministry and Phitalis Were Masakwe, advisor on rights of disabled and advocacy on disability issues.

Representatives from 160 countries discussed the wording of the preamble and the ensuing 34 articles of the convention, which, after being finalized in the next meeting in August, will be submitted to the UN General Assembly for adoption.

The Convention will delineate the rights of the disabled people and the obligations of the States vis-à-vis their disabled citizens, reaching an esti-

mated total of 600 million globally. These obligations are likely to include securing access to health and education services as well as ensuring of access to justice. The Convention is also likely to make it compulsory for signatory governments to support advocacy efforts on issues surrounding disabled people and their rights.

Employment rights of the people with disability will also be covered by the Convention.

The last meeting in August on the draft text of the Convention is expected to focus on the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for the convention.

New Afghan Legislators Keep Building Their Capacities

“This seminar was necessary and timely, it has contributed to the building of our capacity as legislators.”

Noor Mohammad Kafil
Member of the Upper House

SEAL project is supported by France, Denmark, EC, CIDA, GTZ and Italy.

“The topics discussed in this seminar are of great importance to us as Members of Parliament” said Prof. Mahbooba Hoqoqmal, a member of the newly instituted Meshrano Jirga (the Upper House) of the Afghan Assembly. Although she is a Professor of Law and Political Science at Kabul University, she was modest enough to acknowledge that they still needed to learn ways and means of performing their duties as members of a legislature, an institution that has been missing in Afghan political life for decades. “They (the seminars) help us fulfill our duties as people’s representatives”, she added.

Noor Mohammad Kafil, Meshrano Jirga member representing Nijrab District of Kapisa province, echoed his colleague’s sentiments: “This seminar was necessary and timely”, he said. “It has contributed to the building of our capacity as legislators. I hope there will be more seminars of the kind in the future because they are very effective.”

Both Meshrano Jirga members were speaking after the

completion of three rounds of the workshop that touched upon a wide range of issues from Constitutional rights of legislators to oversee the State’s finances to the system of checks and balances involving the three powers of the state, executive, legislative and judiciary.

Among the guest speakers were Zviad Mukbiani, a former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Georgian Parliament, and William Byld, Senior Economic Advisor, the World Bank, alongside Monjurul Kabiri and Dennis Sammut, both advisors to UNDP’s SEAL (Support to Establishment of Afghan Legislature) project.

There was intense interest on the part the legislators throughout the six days of three rounds of the workshop.

The whole event was conducted in three instalments to



Meshrano Jirga members in the training course

ensure that workshop groups would be small so that participants would have better chance of focusing their attention on discussion topics.

The organizers, that is the SEAL project staff, were satisfied to see that their effort was appreciated, as reflected by Prof. Hoqoqmal : «After three decades of war and destruction we have to work towards the country’s rehabilitation, to the establishment of rule of law and to providing oversight of government. This seminar helped us as senators to achieve these objectives.”

Contributions to CNTF Climb up

Australia, New Zealand, European Commission and Estonia also provide funds for CNTF

At January's London Conference, some of the most widely discussed issues were Afghanistan's massive opium production, the dependence of many Afghans on this particular crop for their livelihood and ways and means of reducing this dependence alongside the elimination of opium as the main crop in the country.

As the primary avenue of international support to this cause, the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF), established by the Afghan Government and the UNDP was, predictably, the focus of intense interest on the part of the participants of the Conference.

That the interest demonstrated in the programme during the Conference was not purely skin-deep was proved by the maintenance of post-Conference pursuit of

opportunities by many countries to be part of the effort.

The strongest expression of support for the counter-narcotics cause, in the form of highest financial contribution, came from the Government of the UK with an initial £ 4.5 million (approx US\$ 7.8 m) in the current fiscal year. The funds will be channelled through ADIDU (Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit) within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The UK government was swiftly followed by governments of the United States and Sweden with US\$2 m each. South Korea also declared its commitment to contribute to CNTF although the exact amount of the contribution has yet to be clarified.

But the most important is the declaration of the Government of Afghanistan of its devotion to the counter-

narcotics endeavour: Ministry of Finance has allocated US\$ 30 m to be used by the CNTF in the 1385 fiscal year budget, although this provision still needs to be adopted by both Government and the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that two high level February meetings of the CNTF had to be postponed due to absence of some key members, the Fund has now established a "modus operandi" with many of the line ministries to enable projects to be assessed and approved for implementation.

Efforts are being made to ensure that the departure in February of Madelene Carlsson, the CNTF programme officer, from Kabul for another assignment will not affect implementation efficacy.

Winterization Assistance Project Draws to a Close



A Red Crescent official overseeing distribution of aid material

Thanks to a more coordinated effort and higher level involvement on the part of Afghan government, winterization response has had a higher profile and a more robust implementation efficacy this

year as compared to last, with many more families benefiting from the effort.

The Emergency Commission, who is headed by Karim Khalili, the Vice-President, played a vital role in examining key risk areas and producing estimates for crucial recovery and disaster response activities. Equipped with the experience of lessons learned in previous winter programmes and emphasised by last year's severe winter, the Commission has been pro-active in positioning and issuing both food and essential non-food items in high-risk areas. Total funds of around USD 2,190,000 were donated by USAID, Norway and UK's DFID, and managed by UNDP under the scheme called "Assistance Projects for Winterisation". Based on assessments made by government and Afghanistan Red

Crescent Society, items such as food, heating and cooking fuel, blankets, cooking utensils, tarpaulins and pharmaceuticals were purchased and distributed within 11 high-risk provinces (Kabul, Faryab, Jawzjan, Sari-Pul, Balkh, Samangan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, Bamyán, and Dai Kundi).

Around 10,000 families were directly issued with relief assistance. Some public building refurbishment was undertaken to provide better shelter in Kabul for around 530 displaced families against the effects of winter, and some rental assistance provided to around another 750 families. Essential access road maintenance in critical areas has also been undertaken. Some activities are continuing, but this project is largely complete as at late February 2006.

Grassroots to Have Voice on Livelihood Modalities

Rural communities will be consulted in the process of planning that will identify the priorities and context of future development investment.

With the post-conflict recovery efforts now being gradually replaced by long-term sustainable development endeavors in Afghanistan, more and more emphasis is being placed on programmes to ensure that population in general, rural population in particular, start to feel the benefits of all the assistance and support provided by the international community since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

One particular UNDP programme recently signed by the Government of Afghanistan and UNDP will contribute to the long term development in more than one ways: The second phase of the National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP) will not only further contribute to rural

development, but it will do so by empowering the rural communities to decide on the modalities that will empower them to lead better and more prosperous lives.

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and UNDP have concluded by signing the document on February 22, 2006 that a participatory approach would serve the interests of rural communities in Afghanistan in both raising the level of living standards and in allowing them to express their preferences in a democratic fashion as to how they would like to improve their lot.

The document foresees that rural communities will be consulted in the process of plan-

ning that will identify the priorities and context of future development investment, thus allowing rural population to influence the preferences that will mark the main orientation of the development plans.

At another significant level, the programme will contribute substantially to capacity development process within the MRRD in a way that the Ministry's national human resources will be able to maintain and further expand the rural development schemes in the future.

Implementation will continue throughout the programming cycle of the UNDP Country Office in Afghanistan through 2008.

Capacity Developing Project Generates its Own Income for Activities

The AIMS (Afghanistan Information Management Services) project has quietly accomplished a major achievement that is not frequently seen in implementation of highly technical projects: It has been not only generating income by marketing its products, but also channeling this income to fund the training programmes within its framework.

Since the start of its campaign, the AIMS project has sold 35192 maps to a wide variety of stakeholders involved in development efforts in Afghanistan. It is interesting to note that over the two years in which AIMS maps have been marketed, the most devout customers of the project appear to have been national and international NGOs, (purchasing 51 % of all the maps sold), followed by UN agencies (18%) and the Afghan Government (9%).

The maps created by AIMS cover such a wide variety that one can find information on

anything from the whereabouts of underground water resources to population density, from educational status of the population shown geographically to the amount of foreign aid utilization in provinces and districts.

Such wealth of information plays a vital role in planning and implementation of a wide variety of projects and the AIMS project is now consistently building national capacity in basic skills to ensure that GoA have the ability to use new technology in the future with the technical assistance from AIMS. With some US \$ 110 thousand raised over the last two years through the sale of maps, AIMS project proudly says they



An AIMS funded computer training session

have conducted scores of training courses, including computer and basic English language courses for the staff of government ministries and departments. The funds were also used for translation of computer manuals from English to Dari, for printing of Dari manuals and purchase of



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An image of Afghanistan



Photo by Ayna Khaidova

Calendar of Events for March

- △ ANBP: Further handover of weapons and ammunition to government, this time in Ghazni, March 6
- △ HIV/AIDS Project: Opening of HIV/AIDS Training Centre and Public Library at the Ministry of Public Health (date to be confirmed)
- △ HIV/AIDS Project : Opening of Jalalabad Voluntary Counselling and Confidential Treatment (VCCT) Centre (date to be confirmed)
- △ LOTFA: Monitoring Mission to Samangan and Balkh, 6-12 March
- △ NHDR: Assessment of the articles written by the Kabul University students on poverty issues begins in the last week of March, the winner, author of the best article, is to be announced early April.
- △ RISE (Regional Initiative for Sustainable Economy): Strategy workshop involving all UDG (Urban Development Group) regional project managers, March 1 & 2
- △ NABDP: International bidding on assessment of regional economic generation (throughout March)
- △ NABDP: Pilot phase of comprehensive rural development to be launched in Kandahar and neighbouring regions (date to be confirmed)
- △ NABDP: Workshop on review of Water and Sanitation Project March 12

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