



United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Spokesperson's Office, Kabul, Afghanistan

tel: 00 39 0831 24 6121 – 00 93 (0) 20 297 6121

email: spokesperson-unama@un.org

website: www.unama-afg.org

Afghan women and ex-combatants turn to gardening for peace and prosperity

Herat, 28 April 2008 – An innovative gardening and literacy programme delivered by the United Nations is offering Afghan women and ex-combatants the chance for a fresh start by providing literacy classes and the opportunity to make an income from setting up their own gardening nurseries.

The Green Afghanistan Initiative (GAIN) is run by six United Nations agencies led by the World Food Programme and aims to reverse the environmental damage caused by decades of conflict, uncontrolled grazing and illegal logging through the creation of home nurseries.

Since 2005 over 500 GAIN nurseries run by Afghan women and ex-combatants have been set up across the country. By the end of this year, over five million plant saplings will have been grown and over one million trees planted, helping to rebuild Afghanistan's natural environment, providing an opportunity for families to earn an income and at the same time providing literacy training to thousands of Afghan women and ex-combatants.

Mr. Ghafouri, GAIN coordinator, visiting the Herat centre, said:

“These nurseries are making a huge difference to the lives of ordinary Afghan people and also to our environment. We want to reverse the damage that deforestation has done on rural communities and on farmers' livelihoods. These nurseries provide regular jobs for those that have turned their back on fighting and for Afghan women who now have an income to support their families whilst also benefiting from literacy classes.”

Afghanistan is an arid country prone to desertification. The limited rainfall, years of mismanagement and abuse of natural resources, coupled with recent droughts and floods have exacerbated the problem across the country. Forests and rangelands in particular continue to be harvested well beyond their level of renewal. While desertification advances, the population continues to grow at a rapid pace.

The GAIN will lead environmental rehabilitation efforts, while laying the solid foundations for further forestry development. The provincial re-forestation centres which will be established will combine the functions of agricultural knowledge centres and high-yield nurseries. These centres also aim to increase public awareness and see further forestation programmes established across the country.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For further information, media should contact Shereen Mohammad Noori, Programme Officer, World Food Programme Herat on 079 605 6927 or Nilab Mobarez, UNAMA press officer (Dari, Pashto and English) on 0797 662 503.