



Helping people help themselves through training and jobs

Afghan Action Limited
18 Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PF
T 020 8981 2670 F 020 8981 0634 E admin@afghanaction.com
www.afghanaction.com

MEDIA RELEASE

ISSUE DATE: 3 November 06
For Immediate Release

MEDIA CONTACT: Helen Ashley
020 8974 7246 or 07976 804314

News Release 020/06

GIVE THE GIFT OF HOPE TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN THIS CHRISTMAS

Life in Afghanistan is hard, unbelievably hard. In the Capital, Kabul, grinding poverty often forces families to rely on a meagre income. Afghan Action is a unique charity, helping provide young people (14-25) not only with a better future, but a safe and friendly environment in which to learn the carpet trade and find work; bringing in vital income, in a country where 75% of the population struggles to exist on USD \$1 a day.

This Christmas, you can give the gift of hope to young people and their families in Kabul, by buying one of the 'magical' hand woven carpets they produce – made out of mainly natural wools and vegetable dyes – and based on traditional Kazak tribal designs, knowing they are working under fair conditions, for a fair wage.

Or delight friends and loved-ones with a fantastic ethical gift – so we can help provide young people in Kabul with nourishing food, clean water, an education and other essentials to help them have a better life, learn a trade and get work. You can even buy a Ghazni sheep to restock the flock of the nomadic Kushi people who lost their animals during the wars. A flock of sheep would allow them not only to rediscover their traditional calling, but it means they can also supply the Afghan Action factory with free wool for our carpets and help us use locally sourced, high quality natural materials. "If Afghanistan is to get back on its feet and develop a sustainable economy, it's vital that it's population, especially young people are given the education and training they need and sustainable, employment opportunities that provide a real alternative to the Poppy Trade." says Chris Beales, Chief Executive of Afghan Action.

Afghan Action

Afghan Action is the only charity in Afghanistan that provides training for young people (14 – 25) to learn carpet weaving skills, which then enables them to use their skills to produce carpets in the charity's factory – all under fair trade conditions – and then gets the carpets into international markets.

The young people who are mostly unemployed and without any previous formal education or training, receive 6 months' training in carpet weaving, literacy and numeracy skills and are then either employed in the factory, or start out in a business from home or elsewhere. Afghan Action provides fair wages and good working conditions in the training school and factory, along with daily lunches and medical care for staff and trainees.

Life in Afghanistan

Despite a major international reconstruction effort, Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries - struggling to get back on its feet, whilst remaining economically and politically fragile and dependent on military, charity and government aid.

Reconstruction is painfully slow; large parts of Afghanistan's infrastructure is still in tatters and the vast majority don't have access to electricity or safe water, a decent home, health or education facilities.

Poor education facilities over the last two decades have contributed to poor literacy rates; 71% of Afghans over 15 cannot read or write (rising to 92% for women from rural areas). And still, 3 out of 5 girls never get the opportunity to go to school.

Fair Trade vs Poppy Trade

Cultivating the poppy is Afghanistan's biggest industry and trading heroin accounts for 30% of its economy. Afghanistan now supplies 92% of the world's opium, much of which ends up on the streets in the West, including in the UK, as heroin.

According to the UN, 3 million Afghans are involved in growing opium – 12.6% of the country's population. The majority of the \$3 billion revenue goes to the war lords and the Taliban who control the trade, while the farmers who grow it, scrape only a bare subsistence (UN Office on Drugs and Crime).

“Developing a viable, sustainable alternative to growing poppies is of paramount importance. Afghan Action believes that the best way to overcome the poverty, violence and heroin drug trade is to create jobs and businesses under fair and ethical employment conditions. We want to help Afghan communities help themselves, particularly in an area that offers few opportunities for young women to receive an education or get a job.” says Chris Beales.

Carpet Trade

Afghanistan is one of six great carpet producing areas in the Middle East/Asia. Afghanistan carpets are renowned for their weave fineness, material quality and richness of dyes.

The export of Afghan carpets has declined massively from over 3.5 million square metres in 1999 to 37,000 square metres in 2002. A poor trading infrastructure and a difficulty in regaining access to markets which have been infiltrated by cheaper Turkish and Iranian (mainly machine made) carpets means that Afghanistan has struggled to compete.

And even where they do find a market, “producers get only a small share of the price paid by the final consumers - 8 to 15% of the final price in the case of carpet weavers” (World Bank 2004).

-ends-

Notes to editors:

- *The company Afghan Action is 100% owned by a UK-registered charity, the Afghan Training Foundation.
- For more information visit www.afghanaction.com: Tel:- 020 8981 2670 or email admin@afghanaction.com
- Members of Afghan Action in London are available for interviews. Chris Beales, Chief Executive can be contacted on 07957 135593 and Iain Paton, Commercial Manager on 07791 509984
- The UK Department for International Development (DFID) had partly funded the project.
- We have a range of electronic images available on request.

=====
...PRESS INVITE...PRESS INVITE...PRESS INVITE...PRESS INVITE...PRESS

**Exhibition and Sale of Afghan Action Afghan Kazak Carpets
Evening Reception - 15 November 2006**

You are invited to come along to a canapé reception from 6.30 – 8.30 p.m. to see traditional, handmade carpets produced by Afghan Action’s factory and to talk to staff involved in the project, at Savana Studio, 20 Connaught Street, London W2 2AF. (Nearest tube Marble Arch)

Please let us know whether you would like to attend.

The exhibition and sale will be open to the public from 13 – 17 November from 10.30 a.m. – 5 p.m.