

Buy Afghan First



10 June 2009 - The top UN envoy in Afghanistan has urged the international community in the country to buy locally-produced products and promote Afghan goods and services.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Kai Eide was speaking at a joint conference organized by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Peace Dividend Trust.

The Local Procurement Conference brought together more than 100 Afghan firms and business leaders from a wide spectrum of industries, including construction, media, handicrafts, and logistics, and procurement

officers of major international organizations.

Mr Eide underscored the importance of the international community's commitment to buy local goods and services to boost financial and development support for Afghanistan.

"We want to convince you that there are good Afghan suppliers for many things that you buy and consume everyday. We want to show you how to find those suppliers. Peace Dividend Trust is our partner with the Government of Afghanistan, because they have developed an excellent website to match your specific needs – from the basic necessities such as fruit and vegetables to building materials and technical assistance – with Afghan suppliers," he said.

It was, however, the stalls – ranging from an I.T. one-stop-shop to a military fatigues' vendor – at the conference that got the most attention, with procurement officers hopping from one booth to another.

Ruqia Balkhi, a female entrepreneur and President of Balkhi Construction, a company with an annual turnover of US\$ 5 million and staff of 100 workers, was kept busy throughout the day. Having already dealt with the international community in 2005, when her company built roads for an ISAF compound in Mazar-i-Sharif, she encouraged other businesses to compete for contracts. "This conference is a good opportunity for small and large business owners to meet procurement officers and to exchange ideas," said Ms Balkhi. "It also allows Afghan to raise awareness about their enterprises."

However, it's not only just local Afghans who benefit as a result of trade with the international community.

Sure, on one hand, "increasing the amount of money that is being spent on Afghanistan, in Afghanistan, will create even more jobs," said Mike Capstick, Country Director for Peace Dividend Trust, a non-profit foundation, which supported the conference. But, on the other hand, procuring from local markets "will also help build public support for the international community," according to U.S. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, who stated that American forces awarded US\$ 1 billion worth of contracts to Afghan firms last year.

Afghanistan's Government, too, pledged its support for local businesses and appealed to the international community to promote Afghani products. According to Dr Jalil Shams, Minister of Economy, it is important to coordinate the needs of the foreign buyers and the local sellers: "UNAMA and ISAF can play a role in accessing the needs of buyers...while the Department of Commerce can coordinate."

By Aditya Mehta, UNAMA

Websites:

[UNAMA](#)

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**BUY LOCAL.
BUILD AFGHANISTAN.**

تولید ملی، آینده عالی
د هېواد تولید،
د هېواد پرمختګ

