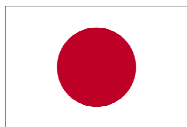




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## PRESS RELEASE

### ***Japan Grants US\$ 19.5 Million to Promote Literacy in Afghanistan*** *UNESCO and the Ministry of Education launch 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Programme for Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA 2)*

**Kabul, 09 March 2010** - UNESCO will receive a grant of US\$ 19.5 million from the Government of Japan for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA 2) programme. The ELA 2, to be jointly implemented by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, will benefit 300,000 youth and adults, particularly women in rural villages in 15 provinces in Afghanistan.

The official signing ceremony was held in the Ministry of Education today, along with the Ambassador of Japan, Mr Shigeyuki Hiroki, and the Director of UNESCO Kabul office, Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, in the presence of the Afghan Minister of Education, Mr Farooq Wardak. During the ceremony, Mr Aoyagi expressed his deep appreciation to the Government of Japan for its continuous support and the Ministry of Education for its strong initiatives in improving persistent illiteracy problem in Afghanistan.

Nearly three decades of conflict in Afghanistan have resulted in the emergence of an illiterate and non-professional generation who have had limited to no access to education. As a result, Afghanistan has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world, with only 34% of the population being literate. In particular, one of ten women in rural areas cannot read and write. Given the present context, equipping the population with sufficient literacy skills is essential to peaceful, democratic and sustainable nation building in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Ministry of Education developed the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), which is the national strategic plan for education and identifies literacy as one of its priorities for the recovery and reconstruction of the country. To contribute to achieving the national literacy goals set forth in the NESP, the 1st phase of ELA was launched in March 2008 through a grant from the Government of Japan. The ELA 1 is currently operating in 9 provinces of Afghanistan (Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamiyan, Daikundy, Ghor, Nangarahar, Samangan, Paktika and Wardak), and will provide literacy education to 300,000 youth and adults during a period of three years. To date, approximately 92,000 people have participated in 9 month literacy classes. In addition, construction of Provincial/District Literacy Centre (PLC/DLC), which aims at enhancing institutional capacity of Ministry of Education, particularly its Department of Literacy, was completed in 3 provinces.



**Mr Shigeyuki Hiroki, Ambassador of Japan (left) and Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi Director UNESCO Kabul (right) exchange the agreement in the presence of Mr. Farooq Wardak, Minister of Education (center).**

In 2009, the Ministry of Education developed NESP II and the National Literacy Action Plan (NLAP) with the support from UNESCO and other partners. While NESP II aims to 'increase the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and over to 48% (43% females and 54% males)' through 'providing literacy courses for 3.6 million learners by 1393/2014 (At least 60% of learners will be women)', the NLAP provides the government, donors and all other literacy stakeholders with a common vision, guiding principles and a sound national strategy that lays out a general framework necessary for the effective implementation of literacy programmes and plans. In line with NESP II and NLAP, the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of ELA (ELA 2) will cover an additional 9 new provinces (Badghis, Faryab, Ghazni, Khost, Kunar, Nimroz, Nooristan, Urozgan and Zabul) and 6 provinces from the 1<sup>st</sup> phase, in which a further 300,000 youth and adults will participate in the literacy programme and selected graduates will be trained in skills development.

Literacy is a fundamental human right and its contribution towards social, economic and political benefit is well documented. Furthermore, empowering disadvantaged people through literacy will play a crucial role in building peace in Afghanistan. Through its 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> phases, ELA will greatly contribute to building peace in Afghanistan and ensuring enhancement of individual life skills and community development throughout the country.

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