Switzerland supports Afghan elections

The Government of Switzerland, through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), has contributed two million Swiss francs (US$1.9 million) to the election process in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s presidential and provincial council elections are to be held on August 20, 2009 and its parliamentary and district council elections, in 2010. Of the total contribution, 1.5 million Swiss francs are being provided to the ELECT project of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to support the overall election process in 2009 and 2010, whereas 0.5 million will be used to promote the involvement of civil society organizations in running civic education programmes, as well as the inclusion of particularly vulnerable minorities. The overall election process is being implemented by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) with technical support from the ELECT project.

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Helvetas wins award for watershed project in Afghanistan

Helvetas, a Swiss NGO, has won the 2009 International ReSource Award for Sustainable Watershed Management. Helvetas will receive prize money amounting to US$150,000. The award was presented by Swiss Re at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul. The project for which Helvetas has been awarded the prize is located in the Kahmard district of Bamyan province. The project is aimed at preventing downstream flood damage and increasing land productivity through holistic watershed management. The Swiss Re award will contribute to building 260 check dams, 9 kandas (water storage system), 15 water ponds, 9 wells, 2,400 stone bonds, 2,700 soil bonds, and 20,000 eyebrows, sowing 1,200 kg of seeds and planting 45,000 trees.

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Switzerland supports...

“The upcoming election is more a practice of democracy rather than a precise selection for Afghan people, because the challenges are huge in comparison with the preparations, facilities and political will”, says Mr. Aziz Rafiee, Director of the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF).

Since the end of 2008, SDC, in addition to its financial contribution, has made every possible effort, along with some other donors in Afghanistan, to secure the participation of Afghan civil society organizations so that coming election processes shall be vested in the Afghan people. This strategy helps SDC achieve its goal of citizenship building in the country. According to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), free and fair elections are crucial to achieving democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and inclusive development in Afghanistan. The first landmark presidential election in Afghanistan was held on October 9, 2004 and the first parliamentary election in three decades was held on September 18, 2005. SDC provided 8.64 million Swiss francs to uphold these processes.

Total international support for the ELECT project amounts to US$224 million. It mainly covers support for the elections themselves, media monitoring and domestic observation of the elections, project management costs, as well as establishment of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) and the Media Commission (MC).

Helvetas wins award for watershed...

The watershed project is part of a Disaster Risk Mitigation Project Helvetas started in 2008, alongside the long-term livelihood improvement program that Helvetas has been implementing since 2006 for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Afghanistan.

The ReSource Award, launched in 2002, is an internationally recognized prize for leadership in implementing sustainability principles in watershed management. With these awards, Swiss Re highlights its support for watershed management efforts by government and non-governmental parties. SDC congratulates Helvetas and involved parties for this award.

Helvetas was founded in 1955 as the first private organization for development cooperation in Switzerland.

Marie-Thérèse Karlen joins SDC Afghanistan as Deputy Country Director

Marie-Thérèse Karlen assumed her new position as SDC’s Deputy Country Director in April 2009, succeeding Hans-Peter Reiser.

She joined the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kabul after a nearly 4-year assignment at SDC headquarters in Bern where she had been working in the Development Policy Unit. Her main activities were closely linked to Swiss development policy in general, with a specific focus on the European Union’s development policy. Because of her background in journalism, she has also been active in communication, contributing to different SDC platforms. As a result of this activity, she had the opportunity to visit SDC partner countries to gather background information on Swiss commitments and to communicate it to a broader public. For this purpose, she visited Afghanistan in March 2007 for the first time.

Before joining SDC in 2005, Marie-Thérèse Karlen worked as a journalist, editor, reporter and announcer for the Swiss National Radio (DRS), mainly for the news department with emphasis on political and economic issues. As for her academic background, she holds a master’s degree in anthropology and, in March 2009, she earned a degree in conflict analysis and conflict prevention from Basle University.

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