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VUSAF

Union of Assistance to
Schools in Afghanistan

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Dear Friends

This spring no-one of our members from Germany was able to visit the projects because of private obligations, however, we still wanted a personal contact with our colleagues in Afghanistan and, therefore, we interrupted our holidays and flew from Dubai to Kabul for a short visit. Maybe it was good that we could not stay for long because only a week later multiple attacks took place on guest houses in Kabul where foreigners like to stay - not far from where we had done our shopping.

We made good use of our four day stay in Kabul for intense discussions with our colleagues who came from Andkhoi and Mazar-e-Sharif to Kabul. These meetings of our staff from three different places which are several hundred kilometres apart take place every two months; twice a year members from Germany are also taking part. There were many topics. Our most important project is our Education Centre in Andkhoi. Our colleagues from Andkhoi reported that the preparatory courses were very popular. Meanwhile, we have preparatory courses not only for the students of the upper grades (10 to 12) but also for students of grades 7, 8 and 9. The students come from four districts of the province of Faryab in which we are active. These courses are necessary because unfortunately because of inadequate qualification of the teachers the quality of education at the state schools is still not good enough. With these courses we are preparing the students for university. Last year, a total of 143 boys and 19 girls have taken the entry test for university.

222 students are attending the English courses and 232 students the computer courses at the Education Centre in order to be able to work in an office later-on. Practical exercises complete their lessons. "Our house" has an excellent laboratory and a library with more than 2000 titles which are borrowed on a regular basis – since the start of the library about 40.000 times. Every day 25 to 20 people come for a visit.

It is always a special challenge to start something new, just like our new training workshop for electricians. In previous months we had found a trainer in Mazar-e-Sharif who has the required experience and brought along the right teaching material. The workshop was adapted for the electricity training. The community was informed so that young men interested in becoming an electrician could apply. This proved somewhat difficult because we were not able to pay a high salary to the trainees. However, we told that because the economic situation continues to be bad; nobody would be able to take part in a long training program without receiving some kind of grant. An additional problem was the duration of the training. We had included Dari, mathematics and physics into the curriculum but we had still overestimated the education the young men had received at school. They had actually completed 9 years at school, however, this was about 10 years ago during the Taliban times. Therefore, we decided to extend the duration of the training to 18 months. We hope that during these 18 months we will not only train good experts but, furthermore, that in future there would be fewer casualties due to improper handling of electricity (The area was connected to the Uzbek electricity grid only four years ago).

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Last year alone, 36 girls from our home courses enrolled to 7th grade of the local girls' schools. Since we started home schooling, a total number of 187 girls joined state schools and another 270 completed grade 6. At present, 214 girls and women aged 13 to 48 attend our home courses and 48 the sewing courses.

Our construction managers reported about their work during the past months and proudly showed us photos of the completed projects. In Chakman (District of Khancharbagh) we built a school and a second floor for a school in Mazar-e-Sharif which we started in 2002 for returnees from the refugee camps in Pakistan. We also managed to complete a double storey school building with 16 classrooms for the Maqsadullah Shaheed High School as well as kitchen and dining room for the Agricultural Institute in Mazar-e-Sharif. Now our construction teams are waiting for further projects. We sent a proposal to the Foreign Office for a new building for the girls' school with 3000 students which we saw in October and hope that we would be able to complete this project during 2010. All schools are growing and need additional classrooms. Elders, school principals, teachers and students have requested additional buildings for their schools. Also our employees report that further requests have been received. We submitted some proposals and hope that we can carry out further projects this year in Andkhoi and Mazar-e-Sharif. Perhaps another chicken project. 2009 we distributed 2400 chickens to 120 families of teachers. The chickens are now producing eggs which is a welcomed source of income for the families.

Now it might seem to you that everything is going well in the Andkhoi region. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Since our return to Germany, we received some bad news. It seems that opposition groups (be it Taliban or criminals) are active in the region. Firstly, so-called night letters (threats) were distributed demanding that the parents do not to send their daughters to school. Then one evening the office of a girls' school was set on fire. On the following day there was another attack on a girls' school. The guard (caretaker) was bound and computers stolen. These incidents worry the parents, the teachers and students and our colleagues very much. The additional foreign troops in the south seem to have shifted the resistance to the north. Despite their worries and concerns, 20 % of the girls came to school the following morning! That filled us with admiration. The girls themselves made clear that no one can keep them from going to school. Furthermore, after the attacks, meetings were held in many schools in the districts together with the district administration, the police and the parents and teachers to ensure the safety of the schools. The parents employed an additional guard who would work together with the official school guard (caretaker). The police are regularly patrolling the areas around the schools.

Of course, we are very unhappy that the unrest has reached Andkhoi and that girls' schools were attacked. However, this should not prevent us from supporting all those who want education for their girls and boys. We do not want to give in and do not want the terrorists to be successful. We would like to repair the school and remove the eyesore. Almost everyone in the area wants their girls and boys of the region to be educated – the visit of the elders from a remote village who demanded the construction of a girls' school last October made it clear to us. We hope that you are also of the same opinion and would continue to support our work also in the future. The new generation whom we help to educate today and their parents want to build a peaceful Afghanistan in the heart of Asia.

With kind regards

Marga and Klaus Flader

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